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Eco-socialism in the early poetry and prose of William Morris

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Eco-socialism in the early poetry and prose of William Morris

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JWMS	*Journal of the William Morris Society*
Letters	*The Collected Letters of William Morris* Vols. I & II ed. Norman Kelvin(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).
OCM	*The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*

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Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the author of the following thesis; that I have consulted all references cited; that the work of which this thesis is a record has been carried out by myself; and that it has not been previously accepted for a higher degree.

Gillian E. Macdonald
10th July 2015

Certificate

This is to certify that Gillian Macdonald has carried out research under my supervision and that she has fulfilled the conditions of the relevant Ordinance and Regulations for the completion of a PhD degree.

Dr. Jodi-Anne George
Senior Lecture in English
University of Dundee
10th July 2015

Abstract

William Morris was a highly significant political and cultural figure of the nineteenth century. He was a great artist-craftsman and was hugely influential in the rise of the Arts and Crafts Movement in the second half of the nineteenth century, a movement which saw the revival of traditional crafts as a reaction to the utilitarianism of industrial mass production. Already an accomplished artist and writer, Morris became, in the 1880s, a significant figure in the development of the socialist movement. Often described as the first English Marxist, Morris 'became' a socialist when he joined the Democratic Federation in 1883. Morris was also deeply concerned about the destruction of the natural world caused by the increasing number of factories and he detested the stark contrast between the poverty of the factory workers and the wealth of the factory owners. He viewed the two, that is, social equality and care of the environment, as inextricably linked. Arguably, his political ideology would be best described today as eco-socialism.

This thesis will demonstrate that, even as a young man, before he became politically active Morris was already thinking deeply about contemporary social and environmental problems, most of which were caused by what he viewed as the scourges of his era, capitalism and its concomitant industrialisation. This will be achieved by an examination of the cultural, social and literary influences on Morris from his childhood up to 1876. This analysis will focus on some of his literary inspirations that have not been explored to date. The aim of this thesis will be achieved , in addition, by a critical reading of Morris's early poetry and prose from his contributions to the *OCM* in 1856 to the publication of *Sigurd the Volsung* in 1876.

Introduction

> '[It is] profit which won't take most ordinary precautions against wrapping a whole district in a cloud of sulphurous smoke; which turns beautiful rivers into filthy sewers, which condemns all but the rich to live in houses idiotically cramped and confined at the best, and at worst in houses for whose wretchedness there is no name.'[1]

William Morris was one of the great polymaths of the nineteenth century. Born in 1834, he is, perhaps, best known today as a pattern designer but he was also considerably more than that. He was a keen mediaevalist and his love of the Middle Ages inspired most of his life's work, which is monumental in both range and volume. Morris was a talented artist-craftsman and was greatly influential in the rise of the Arts and Crafts Movement in the second half of the nineteenth century, a movement which saw the revival of traditional crafts as a reaction to the utilitarianism of industrial mass production. Already an accomplished writer, poet, translator, journalist, artist, craftsman, bibliophile and political essayist, Morris became, in the 1880s, a significant figure in the development of the socialist movement, writing and lecturing prolifically. He was also deeply concerned about environmental issues and was instrumental to the formation of a number of lobby groups: for example, The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (1877).[2]

Morris despised the destruction of the environment caused by the increasing number of factories, and he also detested the stark contrast between the poverty and poor living and working conditions of factory workers and the wealth of the factory owners. He viewed the two, that is, social equality and care of the environment, as inextricably linked. Arguably, his *credo* was what would be best described today as

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[1] William Morris, 'How We Live And How We Might Live' (1884). Quoted in A.L. Morton ed., *The Political Writings of William Morris* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1979), p. 153.

[2] S.P.A.B or 'Anti-scrape'.

eco-socialism. By examining his early poetry and prose from 1856-1876, therefore, this thesis will demonstrate that, even as a young man (before he became politically active) Morris was thinking deeply about contemporary social and environmental problems, most of which were caused by what he viewed as the scourges of his era, capitalism and its concomitant industrialisation.

Morris officially 'became' a socialist in January 1883, aged forty-nine, when he joined H.M. Hyndman's newly formed Democratic Federation. In December 1884 Morris left the Federation to found the Socialist League following a bitter dispute with Hyndman. The Socialist League was, however, as Ruth Kinna has stated, 'an uneasy alliance of anti-Hyndmanite opinion',[3] and eventually Morris left the party in 1890 to form the independent Hammersmith Socialist Society. On the subject of Morris's transition to socialism there are two salient questions which many scholars have sought to address. Firstly, was Morris's declared ideological position the consequence of a transformative experience or, conversely, the result of the development of his ideas over a period of time? Many of his biographers and commentators, from J.W. Mackail [4] to Lavinia Greenlaw,[5] have identified the summer of 1871 as a turning point in Morris's life. It was then that he made the first of two visits to Iceland and saw what was, in his view, a model, communal, egalitarian society inhabiting an awe-inspiring landscape, unspoilt by industrialisation and *laissez-faire* economics. Mackail, Morris's first official biographer, argued, however, that Morris's apparently sudden decision to declare himself a socialist was actually the result of a gradual process of reflection:

> Some people, even among those who knew him well thought of his Socialism as a sudden and unaccountable aberration; or at all events

[3] Ruth Kinna, *William Morris: The Art of Socialism* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 7.
[4] J.W.Mackail, *The Life and Work of William Morris* Vols. I & II (London: Electric Book Co., 2001). First published in 1899.
[5] Lavinia GreenLaw, *Questions of Travel: William Morris in Iceland* (London: Notting Hill Editions, 2011).

> fancied it a movement into which he flung himself in a fit of enthusiasm, without having thought the matter out, and acting on a rash impulse. How much this is the reverse of the truth becomes plain when one traces the long struggle, the deep brooding, through which he arrived at his final attitude, and notes the distaste and reluctance which he often felt for the new movement, which at other moments shone out to him as the hope of the world.[6]

Mackail's statement does not, of course, give any indication of the length of the period of Morris's 'struggle'. Morris himself, in a letter to Andreas Scheu in 1883, appears to suggest that the time of this serious reflection began around 1878:

> Both my historical studies and my practical conflict with the philistinism of modern society have forced on me the conviction that art cannot have a real life and growth under the present system of commercialism and profit-mongering. I have tried to develop this view, which is in fact Socialism seen through the eyes of an artist, in various lectures, the first of which I delivered in 1878.[7]

Morris's phrase 'through the eyes of an artist' points to a second question regarding his transition to socialism, namely the relationship between his art and his political activism. Is it possible, therefore, to trace the development of Morris's political philosophy in his poetry and prose?

Morris's wealth and his bourgeois upbringing made him seem to his contemporaries an unlikely socialist, and he was subjected to charges of hypocrisy and sometimes even ridiculed. This is evidenced in an unsigned article in the *Saturday Review* from January 1885 in which the reviewer describes a recently published interview with Morris:

> For so excellent an artist in English as Mr Morris used to be, his utterances here recorded are curiously ineffective, though by no means less so than his written words in Socialist periodicals, since he left off poetry, which he understood, and took to politics, of which he knows nothing. [...] People [...] may have faintly hoped that Mr Morris would give the *Daily News* interviewer some new lights on that very difficult point of

[6] MacKail, Vol. II, p. 24.

[7] Norman Kelvin, *The Collected Letters of William Morris,* Vol. II (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p.230. (Hereafter, *Letters).*

> conscience and conduct, the fact of a capitalist and 'profit monger' denouncing capitalists and profit-mongers without, as far as it is known, making the least attempt to pour his capital into the lap of the treasurer of the Socialist Church, or to divide his profits weekly with the sons of toil who make them.[8]

The writer of this invective suggests that Morris 'left off poetry' and 'took to politics', implying that these two activities were unrelated. It is certainly true that Morris was not politically active until 1877, (his first public, overtly political, speech was in December of that year at an anti-war meeting sponsored by the Eastern Question Association) but this was six years before he joined the Democratic Federation. In 1879, though, Morris declared that 'it was not possible to dissociate art from morality and politics'.[9] His view was that art should be available to all, not just a small élite. This was the very antithesis of *art for art's sake*, the motto of the nineteenth-century Aesthetic Movement,[10] with which Morris's design work is, paradoxically, often associated. On this topic, Peter Faulkner has stated, however, that Morris 'had nothing but contempt for that movement'.[11] Faulkner's comment is supported by the following extract from Morris's lecture 'The Art of the People' (1879):

> This would be an art cultivated professedly by a few, for a few, who would consider it necessary – a duty, if they could admit duties – to despise the common herd, to hold themselves aloof from all that the world has been struggling for from the first, to guard carefully every approach to their palace of art. It would be a pity to waste many words on the prospect of such a school of art as this, which does in a way, theoretically at least, exist at present, and has for its watchword a piece of slang that does not mean the harmless thing it seems to mean – art for art's sake.[12]

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[8] Peter Faulkner, *William Morris: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 288.
[9] 'The Art of the People', *C.W.* Vol. XXII, p.47.
[10] Typical of the Aesthetic Movement's ideology is Oscar Wilde's Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* which contains such pronouncements as 'There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all'. Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Guild Publishing, 1980), p. ix.
[11] Peter Faulkner, 'The Odd Man Out: Morris Among The Aesthetes', *The Journal of the Decorative Arts Society,* Vol. 34 (2010), pp.77-91, (p.77).
[12] *C.W*. Vol. XXII, pp. 38-9.

The first to make a case for the close relationship between Morris's literary output and his politics was E.P. Thompson in his biography *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (1955).[13] Thompson, who concluded that Morris became a Marxist after he joined the Democratic Federation, traces Morris's socialism to the 'impulse of revolt'[14] that originated in the Romantic tradition. 'Romanticism was bred into his [Morris's] bones and formed his early consciousness', Thompson argues. In addition, he notes that, apart from an early sign in *The Defence of Guenevere* (1858), Morris's poetry was 'to become little more than a yearning nostalgia or a sweet complaint.'[15] Thompson also states, however, that throughout the period between 1858 and 1878, 'the fire of Morris's first revolt still burnt within him'[16] but, like Mackail, he too attaches significance to Morris's trips to Iceland and his engagement with Icelandic literature. Thompson acknowledges that 'from Iceland[…] Morris gained a draught of courage and hope, which was the prelude for his entry into active political life in the later 1870s ',[17] but identifies the foundation of S.P.A.B. in 1877 as the real turning point in his socio-political development.

In *The Romance of William Morris* (1982),[18] Carole G. Silver also makes the connection between Morris's literary output and his socialism. In her book, which traces the intellectual, emotional and literary development of Morris, Silver claims that 'the poems and romances that Morris wrote throughout his life are strands of all his other thought',[19] concluding that 'the evolution of Morris's thought was completed

[13] E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976). First published in 1955 and revised by Thompson in 1976.
[14] Ibid., p.1.
[15] Ibid., p.1.
[16] Ibid. p.2.
[17] Ibid., p.186.
[18] Carole G. Silver, *The Romance of William Morris* (Athens, GA: Ohio University Press, 1982).
[19] Ibid., p.xi.

by socialism.'[20] Similarly, Fiona MacCarthy, in her biography *William Morris : A Life for Our Time,* [21] asserts that the development of Morris's political philosophy was a lifelong process. Whilst MacCarthy acknowledges the importance of Iceland and Icelandic literature to Morris, she ultimately believes that his 'conversion' to socialism was the result of a process which began in his childhood: 'The sequence of events of his whole life had led on to his espousal of the Socialist cause.'[22]

Since 1883, when he joined the Democratic Federation, Morris had been known as a socialist. There are, however, as Ted Benton maintains, 'many socialisms'[23] and it is only relatively recently that the greener aspects of Morris's political philosophy have been examined. On this subject, Patrick O'Sullivan has stated that, 'it is difficult to know where the idea of Morris the proto-green originated',[24] though he does cite Jack Lindsay[25] and A.L. Morton[26] as examples of those who, in the 1970s, referred to the link between Morris's socialism and his environmental concerns. O'Sullivan also argues, however, that Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (1958)[27] was one of the earliest to discuss the ecological aspects of Morris's ideas It was not until the 1990s, however, following the publication of David Pepper's influential book *Eco-socialism*: *from deep ecology to social justice* (1993),[28] that the term 'eco-socialist'[29] was used to describe

[20] Ibid., p.xvii.
[21] Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 2010). First published in 1994.
[22] Ibid., p. 462.
[23] Ted Benton, *The Greening of Marxism,* ed. Ted Benton (London: The Guilford Press, 1996), p.244.
[24] Patrick O'Sullivan, "'Morris the red, Morris the green' – a partial review." *Journal of the William Morris Society* XIX, 2011, pp. 22-38. O'Sullivan's article is a review of scholarly work that centres on the subject of Morris as an ecological or green socialist.
[25] Jack Lindsay, *William Morris. His Life and Work* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Co., 1975).
[26] A.L. Morton ed., *The Political Writings of William Morris* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979).
[27] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958).
[28] David Pepper, *Eco-socialism: From deep ecology to social justice* (London: Routledge, 1993).
[29] According to Ian Angus, the editor of the online journal *Climate and Capitalism*, the first time the word 'eco-socialism' appeared in the title of any publication was in 1980. *Eco-socialism in a Nutshell* was published by the

Morris's type of socialism. In this work, Pepper summarises Morris's political ideology as follows:

> Morris thought that a society liberated through socialism would think about art, and about making attractive urban environments. He also explored 'green' themes like simple lifestyles, harmony with nature, the inherent wastefulness of the market, and above all, the need for 'useful work versus useless toil' (1885) that would produce useful and beautiful products, mental and physical pleasure, and a revival of creativity.[30]

It is perhaps appropriate at this point to provide a working definition of *eco-socialism*. *Socialism* is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'a political and economic theory which advocates that the community as a whole should own and control the means of production.' That is, of course, the opposite of the prevailing economic system of western Europe in the nineteenth century, capitalism, where private individuals or companies owned and controlled the means of production for a profit. (It is worth stating here that the phrase 'community as a whole' implies gender as well as class equality.) *Eco-socialism* is socialism *plus* a concern for the environment and it could, therefore, be defined as a form of socialism which advocates the centrality of nature to economic life, the aim being the creation of a socially just society without destroying the environment. Pepper also argues that although eco-socialism is anthropocentric, humans require a non-material interaction with nature and that it (nature) should not be dominated or exploited but, rather, managed for the collective good. According to this view, furthermore, human beings are not inherently immoral: if they exhibit *hubris*, greed or aggression it is the fault of the socio-economic system. Production and industry are not to be rejected *per se,* but only what is needed for reasonable material well-being to all should be manufactured without destroying nature. Production should not be built on wage

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Writers and Readers Cooperative in London and arranged by Stan Rosenthal, a founding member of the Socialist Environment and Resources Association (SERA).
http://climateandcapitalism.com. (Accessed 31/10/14).

[30] Pepper, p. 62.

slavery, but on voluntary labour which most people will want to give for personal fulfilment and for the good of the community.

This is of course an idealistic vision of society, but all these principles are central to the philosophy which Morris articulated in later life. In his utopian romance *News from Nowhere* (1890), for example, Morris's vision of a future after a socialist revolution is one devoid of human vices: greed, avarice, jealousy and so on. The abolition of all private property and class division has led to the end of the resentment and violence it generated. On the very rare occasions when a violent act does occur, the perpetrator is not punished because 'everybody, transgressors and all, know them for what they are; the errors of friends, not the habitual actions of persons driven into enmity against society.'[31] In this, as Krishan Kumar has coined it, 'first Ecotopia',[32] factories do not exist and a new (and unexplained) power source has been discovered which does not pollute the environment. Men and women of the future live in harmony with nature in sharp contrast to the situation in the nineteenth century when, according to the young Clara, people tried 'to make "nature" their slave, since they thought "nature" was something outside them.'[33] It was not only within his fiction that Morris promoted these views, however. In lectures and essays he argued consistently that class conflict was inevitable under capitalism because of the inequalities this economic system encouraged. In the *Manifesto of the Socialist League* (1885), for example, he states that, 'The richer classes possess all the instruments of labour, that is land, capital and machinery, the producers or workers are forced to sell their sole possession, the power of labour, on

[31] William Morris, *News from Nowhere.* C.W. Vol. XVI (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1912), p.80.
[32] Krishan Kumar, '*News from Nowhere*: The Renewal of Utopia.' *History of Political Thought,* 14 (Spring 1993), p.143.
[33] *C.W*. Vol. XVI, p.80.

such terms as the possessing class will grant them.'[34] Morris was highly critical of the system of organisation of labour which meant that a worker had to perform monotonous tasks with ' [...] a regular hierarchy of masters over him; foreman, manager, clerk, and capitalist, every one of whom is more important than he who does the work'.[35] Accordingly, in his essay 'Useful Work versus Useless Toil' (1884), Morris argued that all people should have rewarding work: that is to say, work in which there was 'hope of rest, hope of product, [and] hope of pleasure in the work itself.'[36]

Morris was equally sympathetic to the notion of gender equality. In 1894 in an interview given to *The Woman's Signal*, he said that, 'under a socialist system, opportunity would be given to *all* persons for doing the work most suitable to them. The economical position of women would be the same as that of men'.[37] Morris did not, perhaps, advance his ideas on women's issues far enough for modern feminists, but he was certainly more progressive than most of his peers. In her biography, MacCarthy makes an important argument for Morris's concern for women's issues although she does not go so far as to claim that he was a feminist. Similarly, Jan Marsh notes that in Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890), for example, women are no longer economically and emotionally dependent on men. She goes on to state, however, that Morris adheres to gender stereotypes: 'Just as emotional stoicism is heroic and 'manlike', so the ability to bewitch, or drive a man to violence, is a female attribute.' [38] (This is particularly evident in Morris's renditions of the Icelandic sagas and is explored in Chapter Four of this thesis). Ruth Kinna in her essay, 'Socialist

[34] www.marxist.org/archive/morrisworks/1885 Accessed 13/10/14.
[35] *C.W.* Vol. XXIII, p.151.
[36] *C.W.* Vol. XXIII, p.99.
[37] William Morris, 'Interviews with Morris: from "The Woman's Signal", 19th April 1894. A Living Wage For Women', *JWMS,* Spring (1994), p.6.
[38] Jan Marsh, 'Concerning Love: News from Nowhere and Gender'. *William Morris & News from Nowhere: A Vision for Our Time* eds. S. Coleman & Paddy O'Sullivan (Bideford: Green Books, 1990), p.113.

Fellowship and the Woman Question', however, argues that Morris's solution to the woman question was a perceptive one . According to Kinna, Morris believed that Victorian women were exploited in the labour force and in bourgeois marriage. Kinna goes on to say that, far from supporting a 'regressive, pre-industrial model of social relations',[39] Morris insisted that 'the resolution of the woman question required the recognition of natural sexual differences as well as the abolition of capitalism.'[40]

Morris was also deeply concerned about the impact of industrialisation on the environment. In a lecture entitled 'The Lesser Arts' (1877), he declared that commerce would only 'blacken rivers, hide the sun and poison the air with smoke or worse'. [41] Morris believed that most of what was produced by Victorian factories was superfluous to society's requirements. The desire for material possessions which Morris termed 'sham wealth'[42] was deemed to be folly for it not only led to the exploitation of one section of society by another, but it was destroying the environment as well. The increase in economic prosperity in nineteenth-century Britain bore a heavy price. Morris on many occasions publically articulated his view that industrialisation was ruining the landscape. This may be seen, for example, in a lecture that he gave in Birmingham in 1880:

> You, of this great and famous town, for instance, which has had so much to do with the Century of Commerce, your gains are obvious to all men, but the price you have paid for them is obvious to many – surely to yourselves most of all: I do not say that they are not worth the price; I know that England and the world could very ill afford to exchange the Birmingham of today for the Birmingham of the year 1700: but surely if what you have gained be more than a mockery, you cannot stop at those gains, or even go on piling up similar ones. Nothing can make me believe that the present condition of your Black Country yonder is an unchangeable necessity in your life and position; such miseries as this

[39] Ruth Kinna, 'Socialist Fellowship and the Woman Question' *Writing on the Image: Reading William Morris* ed. David Latham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 183-196, (p.193).
[40] *Writing on the Image,* pp.186-7.
[41] *C.W.* Vol. XXIII, p.24.
[42] *C.W.* Vol. XXIII, p.110.

> were begun and carried on in pure thoughtlessness, and a hundredth part of the energy that was spent in creating them would get rid of them.[43]

In March 1883, in his lecture entitled 'Art, Wealth and Riches', Morris put forward his socialist views, some of which were extremely radical and unpalatable to class-conscious Victorians. He challenged his audience to:

> [...] face the truth, and admit that a society which allows little other human and undegrading pleasure to the greater part of its toilers save the pleasure that comes of rest after the torment of weary work – that such a society should not be stable if it is; that it is but natural that such a society should be honeycombed with corruption and sick with oft-repeated sordid crimes.[44]

Morris believed that capitalism was not only destroying the lives of human beings, it was destroying nature as well. He clearly realised that ecological destruction would inevitably follow on the heels of productivism, an economic system based upon the profit motive. Morris's political philosophy was undoubtedly 'green' and can be best described as eco-socialism.

The idea that Morris's political ideology was closer to eco-socialism, as opposed to socialism, is well established. In 2011, for example, the William Morris Society published a special issue of its journal entitled *Morris the Green*.[45] Nevertheless, up to the present date, eco-social or eco-critical readings have been predominately focused on Morris's political writings and his later utopian romances and socialist poems. *Morris the Green* does, however, include Bradley Macdonald's 'Morris after Marcuse',[46] an essay which examines the similarities between Morris's aesthetics and 'green' ideas and those of Herbert Marcuse, a key figure in the eco-socialist movement. In his article Macdonald also argues that while some commentators, Thompson for example, tended to separate Morris's aesthetic

[43] *C.W.* Vol. XXII, pp.61-62.
[44] *C.W.* Vol. XXIII, p.152.
[45] *Morris the Green, JWMS* Vol XIX No. 3 (Winter 2011).
[46] Ibid., pp.39-49.

theories from the development of his political ideals, to do so was a mistake. ' At the very least', Macdonald asserts, 'Morris nurtured a critical notion of beauty from his early aesthetic position […] which was given an important social dimension once it was rethought via John Ruskin's "labour theory", that is, the potent notion that the conditions for the flourishing of beauty were directly related to the labouring conditions of ordinary workers.'[47] The other contributions to this issue of the *JWMS*, however, all focus on Morris's *News from Nowhere.* In 'Nowherian dialectic of Nature'[48], for example, Tony Pinkney discusses how nature functions in the utopian romance, and Eddy Kent's 'Green Cosmopolitanism in Morris's *News from Nowhere*'[49] explores the possibility of the natural world 'being fully incorporated into the political arena.'[50]

This thesis will advance Morris scholarship by testing the hypothesis that his transition to eco-socialism was gradual rather than sudden, and that it began at a very early stage in his life. This will be achieved, firstly, by an examination of the cultural, social and literary influences on Morris from his childhood up to 1876. This will not, however, be another biographical narrative of Morris but, rather, will focus on some of his literary inspirations that have not been explored to date. In Chapter One, for example, the influence that the mediaeval poem *Piers Plowman* had on Morris's contributions to the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* (1856) is discussed in depth. And in the third chapter, the close, and hitherto unidentified, correlation between the Old English elegies and *The Earthly Paradise* is examined in detail.

The aim of this thesis will be achieved, in addition, by a critical reading of Morris's poetry and prose from the period 1856-1876. There have, of course, been

[47] Ibid.,p.42.
[48] Ibid., pp.50-63.
[49] Ibid., pp.64-78.
[50] Ibid., p.66.

many analyses of Morris's earlier work, but none has been specifically from the standpoint of his 'green' socialism. This thesis, therefore, will trace the development of Morris's political ideology by means of a detailed eco-social reading of Morris's major literary works of the period prior to 1876.

Accordingly, this thesis is divided into four chapters which deal with Morris's poetry and prose in chronological order. Chapter One (1854-1859) is comprised of an analysis of Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* and some of his contributions to the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*. *The Life and Death of Jason: A Poem* and his incomplete *Scenes of Troy* are the subjects of Chapter Two (1860-1867). In Chapter Three (1868-1870), *The Earthly Paradise; A Poem,* is considered and Chapter Four (1871-1877) largely deals with Morris's Icelandic period, including *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs.* Each chapter consists of an in depth examination of the specific literary and social influences on Morris during the period covered. This is followed by an eco-social reading of his main creative output of the time. The critical reading in each chapter is divided into sections which demonstrate how the main tenets of eco-socialism are reflected in Morris's early work. The first section on social equality and the importance of the community is of course relevant to socialism as well as eco-socialism. The second part concerns the portrayal of women and explores the extent to which Morris's belief that capitalism exploits women both as workers *and* as women can be detected. Indeed, the latter is a view advanced by modern eco-feminists as well. Eco-feminism is a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. Eco-feminism, therefore, brings together elements of the feminist and green movements. The green movement is concerned about the impact of human

activities on the environment and feminists argue that society is gendered in ways that inevitably subordinate and exploit women. Eco-socialists argue that humans should not exploit the natural world nor other humans. Eco-feminists contend, however, that in a capitalist patriarchal society it is *men* who dominate and exploit both women and the natural world. On this topic Mary Mellor, for example, has argued that 'a socialism that does not challenge the economic and sexual domination of women by men will never achieve an egalitarian society, nor one that is ecologically sustainable.'[51] Morris portrays many of his legendary female characters in close harmony with the natural world[52] and this has a critical resonance in eco-feminist theory. The mistreatment of Morris's heroines by men is analogous to the exploitation of both women and nature in Victorian patriarchal industrial society.

The third section of the critical reading looks at how the importance of work is embodied in Morris's poetry and prose. The fourth division engages with the way in which Morris represents nature and its importance to the individual as well as to society as a whole. The final part of each critical reading focuses on the folly of materialism and how people's greed for riches, a metaphor for the acquisitive nature of capitalism, destroys the individual, society and the environment.

By an in depth examination of Morris's social and literary influences, and a critical reading of his main publications between 1856 and 1876, this thesis will demonstrate that the main tenets of eco-socialism are embodied in Morris's early poetry and prose *before* he began publically to articulate his political views.

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[51] Mary Mellor, 'Eco-feminism and Eco-socialism' in *The Greening of Marxism* ed. Ted Benton. (London: The Guildford Press, 1996), pp.251-267, (p.264).

[52] For example, Medea in *The Life and Death of Jason* (Chapter Two) and Atalanta and Œnone in *The Earthly Paradise* (Chapter Three).

Chapter One

The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems and the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* (1856-59)

(I) Introduction.

In this chapter, Morris's nascent eco-social thought expressed in his first volume of poetry, *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* (1859), and his contributions to the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* (1856) is demonstrated. This chapter commences with a detailed examination of Morris's early life and his eclectic reading habits (particularly in relation to the literature and history of the Middle Ages) which influenced his poetry and prose. As a child, Morris acquired a love of nature and a deep sense of Christian fellowship which also affected his earliest publications. This analysis is followed by an eco-social reading of Morris's first published works which reveals his early sense of responsibility for the state of society and the environment.

(II) Sources and influences.

In July 1856, six months after signing articles to study architecture under the prominent architect, G. E. Street, Morris wrote to his friend Cormell Price:

> [...] I can't enter into politico-social subjects with any interest, for on the whole I see things are in a muddle, and I have no power or vocation to set them right in ever so little a degree. My work is the embodiment of dreams in one form or another [...][1]

Morris's reluctance to engage actively with political and social issues at this point in his life is, perhaps, understandable, for he had had a cosseted, bourgeois upbringing

[1] *Letters,* Vol. I, p. 28.

in rural England. He was twenty-two years old, had just come of age and, as a result of a substantial inheritance from his father, was financially independent. This enabled him to choose his own path in life. In addition, he had recently met the 'very great'[2] Dante Gabriel Rossetti, a founder member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, who had encouraged Morris to begin painting, an art which he intended to master but never did to his own satisfaction.[3] For Morris at that time, only two things were important, 'love and work'.[4] It was not that he was unaware of social and political issues but, rather, that as an artistic and romantic young man on the threshold of life he was absorbed by other things which seemed far more important to him. Much later, in a letter to the Austrian refugee, Andreas Scheu, in 1883, Morris wrote that he had, whilst at Oxford, read the works of Charles Kingsley and, '[...] got into my head [...] socio-political ideas which would have developed probably but for the attractions of art and poetry.'[5]

Although he had always been a 'great devourer of books'[6] there is no evidence that, prior to his arrival at Oxford University as an undergraduate in January 1853, Morris had read anything by contemporary political and social commentators such as Thomas Carlyle and Charles Kingsley, nor novels which emphasised the plight of the urban poor and which criticised the acute class disparity: Elizabeth Gaskill's *Mary Barton* (1848), for example. It is, however, highly likely that Morris would have been familiar with at least some of the works of Charles Dickens (*Oliver Twist* (1838), for instance), given the author's huge popularity at the

[2] *Letters,* Vol. I, p.28.
[3] Morris's only extant easel painting is a portrait of his wife, Jane, as *La Belle Iseult,* and dates from the period prior to their marriage in 1859. The painting is now in the Tate Gallery. (Figure 2.)
[4] *Letters,* Vol. I, p.28.
[5] *Letters,* Vol. II, p.227.
[6] Ibid., p.228.

time. In an interview for the magazine *Bookselling* in 1895, Morris said of Dickens that:

> I am particularly fond of Dickens [...] especially *Pickwick* and I have always felt that there has not yet been published an edition of Dickens's works in any way worthy of him. I should be delighted to print him at my [Kelmscott] press.[7]

The biographer Fiona MacCarthy has argued convincingly that Morris's childhood was apolitical and sheltered from the social upheavals of the period. On this point she comments that:

> 'The condition of England' question was obsessing, and dividing, more liberally inclined professional families by the middle 1840s. Political debates passed the Morris household by. At Woodford Hall [Morris's childhood home], Carlyle was not a name to conjure with. [...] There is no sign that the Morris family apathy was lifted even when the Great Chartist demonstration in London in 1848 brought social disturbances close to home.[8]

Little is known of the politics of Morris's father but, as a City of London bill-broker, Morris senior acquired wealth and social status, albeit indirectly, from the industrialisation and resulting increase in trade of the early nineteenth century. His family lived in what Morris later described as 'the ordinary bourgeois style of comfort'.[9] It could be inferred then that, since his *nouveau riche* way of life depended on the preservation of the *status quo,* Morris's father was unlikely to hold or promulgate radical views and that his politics could be reasonably described as conservative. One might also argue, however, that Morris's ignorance of contemporary socio-political events was a consequence of his parents' desire to protect and shelter their children rather than fostered out of selfish apathy. It is noteworthy that in adulthood Morris was not the only member of his family who worked to improve the conditions of the working class. Following their marriage in

[7] *Collected Interviews* (London: The William Morris Society Library, February 2011), p.107.
[8] MacCarthy, p.25.
[9] *Letters,* Vol. II, p.227.

1850, Morris's eldest sister, Emma, and her husband, the clergyman, Joseph Oldham, chose to devote their lives to the service of the poor in a new industrial town, Clay Cross in Derbyshire, rather than pursue a profitable career in the church.[10] Furthermore, Morris's younger sister, Isabella Morris Gilmore, trained as a nurse following the death of her husband in 1882, despite the opprobrium of most of her family. Later, she became a Deaconess in the Church of England and ministered to the impoverished of South London were she encountered dreadful conditions and became, like her brother, acutely conscious of the evils of class inequality. Isabella wrote of these experiences that:

> It was an agony to find how terrible their condition was, they were heathen, went to no place of worship & in the low parts the education was a dead letter, the sanitary laws were nil, the overcrowding ghastly & the dirt and poverty beyond all words.[11]
>
> Rich people living in West London know hardly anything about the South Bank [...] yet for whom do these toiling millions work? For rich London.[12]

In the Morris household there was, perhaps, no discussion of Chartism and other contemporary socio-political concerns, but a strong evangelical Christian ethos of compassion and caring for those less fortunate than oneself was inculcated in Morris and his siblings from an early age.

Though there is no extant catalogue of the books held in his family's library at Walthamstow, Morris's childhood home, according to J.W. Mackail, his early biographer and son-in-law of his close friends, Edward and Georgiana Burne-Jones, Morris was reading Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* novels when he was only four years old. As a child Morris grew to love all things mediaeval and even had his own suit of armour. His sister, Isabella, recalls looking out of her nursery window and seeing:

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[10] Dorothy Coles, 'My Dearest Emma: William and Emma Morris' *JWMS*, Vol. 16.1 (Winter 2004), pp. 45-61, (p. 53).
[11] Frank Sharp, 'Isabella Morris Gilmore' *JWMS* Vol. 11.4 (Spring 1996), pp. 31-58, (p. 34).
[12] Janet Grierson, *Isabella Morris Gilmore: Sister to William Morris.* (London: S.P.C.K., 1962), p. 97.

> A small knight in shining armour [...] mounting his pony, and she knew that in a few moments she would see him galloping off into the forest to challenge his enemies with battle-cry and brandished sword.[13]

His elder sister Emma later described how they read Clara Reeve's Gothic novel, *The Old English Baron* (1778) together, 'pouring over the enthralling pages till both were wrought up to a state of mind that made them afraid to cross the park to reach home'.[14] There is no comprehensive record of the books he read as a child but Morris had (as he himself later wrote) by the time he was seven years old 'read a great many books good, bad and indifferent'.[15] It could be conjectured that the volumes in his parents' library were probably not of a radical nature but, rather, the ordinary staples of the early Victorian middle-class: the Bible, Shakespeare, seventeenth-century writers such as Milton and Bunyan and reference books. Morris did, however, have access to the new inexpensive publications, colloquially known as 'yellow-backs', which widened the range of fiction, particularly that of historical romance, available to him and his contemporaries. According to his son-in-law Henry Halliday Sparling, Morris first read Lady "Speranza" Wilde's translation of William Meinhold's *Sidonia the Sorceress* (1847)[16] in the 'little volumes of Simm's and McIntyre's Parlour Library when he was a boy'.[17] Morris thought that *Sidonia* was a masterpiece of its kind in its ' [...] faultless reproductions of the life of the past; not mere antiquarian studies, but presentments of events, the actors in which are really alive, though under conditions so different from those of the present day.'[18] Much

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[13] Ibid., p.1.
[14] Mackail, Vol. 1, p.8.
[15] *Letters,* Vol. II, p.228.
[16] This Gothic romance, which was based on the life of the notorious sixteenth-century Pomeranian noble woman Sidonia von Bork, who was tried and executed for witchcraft, was extremely popular, particularly among the Pre-Raphaelites. Edward Burne-Jones' painting, *Sidonia von Bork* (1860) is in the Tate Gallery London.
[17] H. Halliday Sparling, *The Kelmscott Press and William Morris: Master Craftsman* (London: MacMillan & Co Ltd., 1924), p.110.
[18] Ibid., p.110.

later, *Sidonia the Sorceress* (1892) was one of the first volumes to be published by Morris's Kelmscott Press.

There may be no detailed list of the books that Morris read as a boy, but it is possible to identify the volumes that influenced him during his childhood and adolescence by considering both his choice of books for the last great project of his life, the Kelmscott Press (1891-1896), and his list of the Best Hundred Books compiled in 1886 in response to a request by the editor of *The Pall Mall Gazette.* In November 1895, Morris outlined his aims in founding the Kelmscott Press:

> I began printing books with the hope of producing some which would have a definite claim to beauty[...] I have always been a great admirer of the calligraphy of the Middle Ages, and of the earlier printing which took its place.[...] And it was the essence of my undertaking to produce books which it would be a pleasure to look upon as pieces of printing and arrangement of type. [...] I found I had to consider chiefly the following things: the paper, the form of the type, the relative spacing of the letters, the words, and the lines, and lastly the position of the printed matter on the page.[19]

Although his 'chief' considerations pertained to the craft of printing developed in the late Middle Ages, Morris did not waste this art on anything which he considered unworthy. Sparling, who edited many of the volumes printed by the Kelmscott Press, noted that:

> [...] with two or three exceptions, where friendship intervened, every Kelmscott Press book was either a work of his [Morris's] own or an old favourite, long valued, whose production in decent seeming form was an act of love. [...] Above and before all else, a book must be worth reading to be worth printing and his [Morris's] choice of books depended on his preferences from that point of view.[20]

It has been observed by some critics, MacCarthy amongst them, that the majority of the volumes issued by the Kelmscott Press were, in fact, Morris's own.[21] This might suggest a lack of humility, *hubris* even, but in his defence are two important factors.

[19] Ibid., p.135.
[20] Ibid., p.91.
[21] Of the fifty-three books issued by the Kelmscott Press, twenty-three were Morris's own works and five more were his translations. A complete list of the books issued is found in Appendix 1.

Firstly, both the output and the very existence of the Kelmscott Press were cut short by Morris's death in 1896. As a result, many projects (Froissart's *Chronicles,* for example*)* were abandoned and many more envisaged by Morris, such as Dickens's *Complete Works* and a volume of Old English ballads, were never even begun. Secondly, Morris freely admitted that he wanted to see ' [...] my own writings in the handsomest type but apart from that I wished to print masterpieces in literature, and particularly to give a turn to Early English classics like Caxton's.'[22] His objective was to preserve his work in a well-crafted and aesthetically pleasing format. Morris's *Book of Verse,*[23] the volume of poetry that he had presented to his friend and *confidante,* Georgiana Burne-Jones, in 1870 was not only hand-written by Morris, but was illustrated by him also. Furthermore, Morris's use of the words '*apart from'* indicates a clear distinction in his mind between his own works and 'masterpieces in literature'.

One of the greatest achievements of the Kelmscott Press was, arguably, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer,* usually referred to as the *Kelmscott Chaucer.*[24] This volume, edited by F.S. Ellis and illustrated with the designs of Edward Burne-Jones, was to take almost six years to complete. Morris had known and loved the poetry of Chaucer as 'a schoolboy',[25] and it was to remain a favourite throughout his life. As Sparling has said, 'Chaucer was a friend who reached out a hand to him across the centuries, leading him through the scenes and introducing him to the folk of that uncommercialised England he [Morris] so deeply regretted.'[26] Morris's life-long passion for the Middle Ages and mediaeval literature is evidenced by the fact that,

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[22] William S. Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 97.
[23] Figure 3.
[24] Figure 4.
[25] Sparling, p.109.
[26] Ibid., p.109.

with the exception of a few volumes by contemporaries such as Tennyson, and the Romantics, (Shelley and Keats) the majority of the output of the Kelmscott Press (apart from Morris's own works) date from the fifteenth century or earlier. In *The Decorative Illustration of Books* (1896), Walter Crane, the designer and illustrator, praised Morris's achievements in the art of printing and commented on Morris's 'mediaeval bias (in an artistic sense) which may be said to be almost exclusive.'[27] Morris was particularly fond of William Caxton's fifteenth-century translations of French works such as *The History of Reynard the Foxe* and *The Order of Chivalry* although we cannot be sure when Morris read them. The first book printed by the Kelmscott Press, was Morris's own *The Story of the Glittering Plain.* Morris had planned Caxton's translation of Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend* as the first publication but, as Sparling notes, 'had it not been for an oversight which resulted in the delivery of the wrong size of paper, the first book would have been produced in honour of the first English printer.'[28] Morris's bias towards classical and mediaeval literature is also present in his 1886 list of Best Hundred Books but, unfortunately, Morris does not state when he first read any of the books on this list. Morris's early school curriculum, however, was likely to have been comprised of the Bible, classical authors such as Homer, Plato and Sophocles and the works of Shakespeare, books which appear on his list, and possibly Dante, tales of the Norse Kings and *Omar Khayyam* and 'other Arab and Persian poetry'[29] which he also mentions.

In preparation for a career in the Church, Morris was sent to Marlborough College in 1849 following the death of his father. Conditions there were harsh and

[27] Walter Crane, *The Decorative Illustration of Books* (London: Senate Editions Ltd, 1994), p. 157.
[28] H.Halliday Sparling, p.92.
[29] *Letters,* Vol. II, p.246.

Morris was not happy, but he did find solace in his exploration of the surrounding countryside and in the library where there was, according to Morris, 'a good collection of books on the Middle Ages'.[30] Whilst there, Morris was taught English, Classics, French and Mathematics by various masters, most of whom were in Holy Orders.[31] Though we cannot be sure exactly which books he read whilst there, given that Marlborough was a school predominately for the sons of clergymen and for boys who intended to follow a career in the Church, it is likely that the library catalogue comprised mainly ecclesiastical and historical volumes and that Morris was not exposed to any contemporary political pamphlets or novels. Morris was considered a loner and did not form any lasting friendships at Marlborough. He appears, however, to have absorbed the neo-mediaeval ethos of the college which, like many public schools of the time, was that of a brotherhood of young men abiding by a code of Christian manliness. Morris was confirmed at Marlborough and developed an interest in the High Church, an interest which he maintained until his early days at university.

Thus, the young Morris began his first term at Oxford still intent on becoming a clergyman. He took great pleasure in this perfect mediaeval city which, in 1853, was still largely unspoilt. He was less impressed by the university curriculum (mainly classics) which he felt lacked practical usefulness. Morris wrote to his mother that, 'a University education fits a man as much for being a Ship-Captain as a Pastor of Souls'.[32] Nevertheless, he was able to take advantage of the extensive library and read even more widely than he had at home and at Marlborough. During his first terms at Oxford, Morris not only read the prescribed religious works such as

[30] Linda Richardson, 'William Morris's Childhood and Schooling'. *JWMS* Vol. 9.1 (Autumn 1990), pp. 15-9, (p.17).
[31] A.G. Bradley, A.C. Champneys & J.W. Baines, *A History of Marlborough College during Fifty Years from its Foundation to the Present Time.* (London: John Murray, 1893), p.70.
[32] *Letters,* Vol. I, p.25.

Milman's *Latin Christianity* (1855) and Neale's *An Introduction to the History of the Eastern Church* (1850) but also the recent polemical essays by the Tractarians, Newman, Pusey and Keble.[33] In addition, he read the works of contemporary poets, revelling in the neo-mediaevalism of Tennyson and Browning, and the Romantics, his favourite being Keats. He also read Benjamin Thorpe's *Northern Mythology* (1851), three volumes of Nordic myths which inspired much of Morris's literary output during the following decades. In addition, he studied the works of social commentators of the time, Thomas Carlyle, Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes, for example: men who condemned the economic greed of the middle and aristocratic classes and called for an end to the sufferings and injustice caused by the mechanisms of an industrial society. Morris was sympathetic to these views as A.M.D. Hughes notes:

> In many men the devouter and deeper instincts, chilled in the mercantile present, were twining with the memory of whatever was great, beautiful, morally sane, and humanly satisfying in the past. Many, in the face of the appalling state of the new towns, were wishing that the wheels of Time would run back to some simpler and wholesome age, and there stay.[34]

Charles Kingsley, for example, saw Socialism as deriving from a Christian sense of decency.[35] It is likely that Morris would have been drawn to the works of Kingsley, who was both a clergyman and an historian: Morris studied history and planned to take Holy Orders. It is probable that Morris read Kingsley's *Alton Locke*

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[33] As a reaction to the prospect of Church Reform in the 1830s the Oxford dons Newman, Pusey and Keble produced a series of tracts attacking the apostasy of the state in presuming to apply liberal doctrines to the management of the Church. Suspected by many for being too Catholic, the Oxford Movement, as it was also called, effectively ended in 1845 when John Henry Newman converted to the Church of Rome.

[34] A.M.D. Hughes, *Introduction* to Thomas Carlyle's *Past and Present* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1918), p. Lii.

[35] Kingsley was greatly influenced by his reading of F. D. Maurice's *The Kingdom of Christ* (1838), a book which deplored the obsession with the minutiae of the doctrinal differences which caused squabbles between the High Church and Low Church. Maurice was a theologian and Christian Socialist who objected to the Tractarians. He concluded that such pedantic arguments were facile when juxtaposed with the social deprivation and poverty endured by many. 'Their error […]consists of opposing […]the spirit of a former age, instead of the ever-living and acting Spirit of God'. Quoted in A.N. Wilson, *The Victorians* (London: Arrow Books, 2002), p. 323. In relation to this, A.N. Wilson argues that, 'the glaring and obvious call for nineteenth-century Christians was to recognise the incarnate Christ in the suffering poor, and to make society more just, more equal and more fair.' *The Victorians,* p. 299.

(1850), a novel about the social injustice experienced by workers in the clothing trade in the nineteenth century, as well as his more overtly didactic *Twenty-Five Village Sermons* (1849) and *Sermons on National Subjects* (1852). Morris also read the works of the Scottish historian and social commentator, Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881). Carlyle was far from being a clergyman, of course. Indeed, he had abandoned orthodox religious belief altogether but Morris's interest was probably whetted by reading Carlyle's famous *The French Revolution – A History* (1837). Morris also went on to read Carlyle's other political works, *Chartism* (1840) and *Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question* (1849). It was, however, Carlyle's *Past and Present* (1843) which was to influence Morris the most. In this book, described by A.N. Wilson as 'in part an essay about the medieval chronicles of St. Edmundsbury Abbey in Suffolk and in part a rant against the times',[36] Carlyle condemns both Capitalist greed and Victorian obsession with Christian morality. Despite, as A.M.D.Hughes has said, the 'real flaws in his thinking',[37] it was an influential book, especially to the young nobility. Morris would certainly have been attracted to the historical content of the volume and, in addition, would have been sympathetic to Carlyle's condemnation of the industrial age. When taken to that national celebration of Victorian industrial achievements, The Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace in 1851, Morris, although only seventeen years old, refused to go beyond the entrance hall, dismissing it as 'wonderfully ugly'.[38] It is interesting to note the similarity between Carlyle's social battle-cry, 'Awake, ye noble workers, warriors in one true war'[39] and Morris's much later 'The Day is Coming' (1885), the first of his *Chants for Socialists:*

[36] A.N.Wilson, p. 158.
[37] A.M.D. Hughes, p. LXXX.
[38] Grierson, p. 4.
[39] Thomas Carlyle, *C.W. Vol. X* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1904), p. 276.

> Come hither, lads, and harken for there is a tale to tell
> Of the wonderful days a-coming, when all shall be better than well[40]

In his 1894 essay 'How I became a Socialist', Morris acknowledged his admiration for Carlyle's ideas as well of those of Carlyle's friend, John Ruskin:

> Before the uprising of *modern* Socialism almost all intelligent people were, or professed themselves to be, quite contented with the civilisation of the century[...] But beside these contented ones were others who were not really content but were coerced into silence by the measureless power of Whiggery. [...] there were a few who were in open rebellion against the said Whiggery – a few, say two, Carlyle and Ruskin.[41]

It was Ruskin, however, who was to have the most lasting effect on Morris. Morris read Ruskin's works whilst at Oxford and was given to reading passages out loud to his friends. The undergraduate was impressed by Ruskin's book *The Stones of Venice* (1853), in particular the chapter entitled *On the Nature of Gothic.* Ruskin believed that the Middle Ages were 'the great era of art in Europe, because the Gothic spirit gave the opportunity for numerous workmen to express themselves creatively in their work'. [42] In this polemic against industrialism, Ruskin related the history of Venice to ideas about the artisan in the industrial age. Ruskin emphasised the importance of pleasure in labour and criticised the dispiriting nature of the monotonous work done in factories. 'You must either make a tool of the creature, or a man of him. You cannot do both.'[43] Morris later expressed his indebtedness to Ruskin's work. 'To some of us when we first read it [...] it seemed to point out a new road on which the world should travel'.[44] It was, however, some years before Morris was to develop Ruskin's ideas in his own essay 'Useful Work versus Useless Toil'

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[40] William Morris, *Chants for Socialists* www.marxist.org/archive/morris (accessed 12th Feb 2011).
[41] *C.W.* Vol. XXIII, p.279.
[42] Peter Faulkner, *The Odd Man Out: Morris Among the Aesthetes. The Journal of the Decorative Arts Society* Vol. 34 (2010), p.77.
[43] E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, eds. *The Collected Works of John Ruskin* Vol X (London: George Allen 1903-1912), p.192.
[44] MacCarthy, p.69.

(1884). In 1892, Morris commemorated Ruskin's work by producing a Kelmscott Press edition of the influential chapter entitled *On the Nature of Gothic.*

(III) *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*

Morris's earliest published works of poetry and prose appeared in 1856 in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine (OCM),* a periodical founded by Morris, Edward Burne-Jones and other university friends. Modelled on the earlier Pre-Raphaelite magazine *The Germ,* the *OCM* contained prose, poetry and reviews and was published monthly throughout its single year of existence. It was funded by Morris and largely under his editorial control. Morris's contributions to the magazine[45] comprised eight prose romances, five poems, an essay on the churches of Northern France and a review of Browning's *Men and Women.* These pieces reveal the undergraduate's eclectic reading habits which included northern mythology, folklore and romance, both mediaeval and gothic. His first publications also embody, albeit in embryonic form, themes which were to be the subjects of his later poetry and prose: heroism, and love, both fraternal and erotic, as well as fate and death. At this time Morris had also read Southey's edition (1817) of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur,* a book that was to remain a favourite of his for the rest of his life. (*Le Morte D'Arthur* appears on Morris's list of Hundred Best Books in 1886 and, prior to his death, he had intended printing a Kelmscott edition of Malory's work.)[46] Morris empathised deeply with the chivalric ideals of honour, chastity and courtly love promulgated in Malory's work. The Knights of the Round Table were, for example, charged by their king:

[45] A list of all Morris's contributions to the *OCM* is provided in Appendix II.
[46] Sparling, p.174.

> [...] never to do outrage nor murder, and always to flee treason, and to give mercy unto him that asketh mercy, upon pain of forfeiture of their worship and lordship of King Arthur for evermore, and always to do to ladies damosels and gentlewomen and widows succour; strengthen them in their rights, and never to enforce them, upon pain of death. Also, that no man take no battles in a wrongful quarrel for no love, nor for no worldly goods.[47]

Morris was a voracious reader of mediaeval romances in general but, through his reading of Lord Berners' translation of Froissart's *Chronicles,*[48] a fourteenth-century prose narrative of the first part of the Hundred Years war, he acquired a scholarly knowledge of mediaeval history as well. Hence, Morris's early romances, mostly set in the Middle Ages, are imbued with the heroic ideal though this idealism is often tempered by the gritty realities of mediaeval life. Ostensibly writing about events which occurred in the Middle Ages, however, Morris effectively offers a critique of contemporary society. In his contributions to the *OCM* it is possible to trace the origins of the eco-social concerns that Morris was later to articulate: social and gender equality and the importance of pleasurable work and nature to all men and women. These, Morris believed, were threatened by the rampant materialism of his time which he felt to be an inevitable consequence of competitive capitalism.

(i) Social equality and sense of community

The first issue of the *OCM* was printed in January 1856 and contained Morris's 'The Story of the Unknown Church'. This Gothic tale was almost certainly inspired by Morris's tour of the churches of Northern France the previous summer. It was during that expedition that Morris and his friend Burne-Jones decided to begin a

[47] Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur* ed. Helen Cooper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.57.

[48] *Sir John Froissart's Chronicles of England, France, Spain, Portugal, Scotland, Brittany, Flanders, and the Adjoining Countries*, trans. by John Bourchier, Lord Berners (London: F.C. & J. Rivington and others, 1812). Morris was a great admirer of Froissart whose *Chronicles* had, according to Morris, an 'epic impartiality'. In the introduction to his *The Revolt of Ghent,* Morris says of Froissart that '[he] has given me at least as much pleasure as he did to any one of the lords, ladies, knights, squires and sergeants who first heard him read'. (Edmonton: Black Cat Press, 2011), p.3.

life devoted to Art[49] rather than the Church. Morris may also have drawn on his knowledge of the history of Canterbury Cathedral which he had first visited as a child. According to MacCarthy, Morris was later to describe 'in terms of awe'[50] the impact his first sight of the Cathedral had on him. Like the church in Morris's story, Canterbury Cathedral was destroyed by fire and its subsequent re-building during the period 1174-1178 by the French stone mason, William Sens, brought the Gothic style of architecture which Morris so greatly admired to England.

The 'Unknown Church' is a first person narrative, related from beyond the grave by Walter, a master-mason and monk, and is reminiscent of a mediaeval dream-vision like William Langland's fourteenth-century poem *Piers Plowman*. Throughout Langland's poem, Will experiences a number of dreams in his quest to understand the tenets of his faith and the role of the individual in both Church and Society. It is a religious allegory but, as Gillian Rudd observes, 'there is a good deal of questioning of how such [religious] belief ought to be manifested in the life of a layman'.[51] Additionally, *Piers Plowman* is viewed by some as a political text: it was written during the time of social unrest which culminated in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 and is often associated with John Wycliff (1328-1384), an early reformer who challenged the authority of the Catholic Church by opposing papal *puissance* and translating the Bible into English, thus making it accessible to more than the élite who could read Latin. Interestingly, Morris was later to write a romance about the Peasants' Revolt, *The Dream of John Ball (*1886/87). The author of *Piers Plowman* (like Morris in later life) is critical of the social injustice caused by the hierarchical

[49] MacCarthy, p.95.
[50] MacCarthy, p.18.
[51] Gillian Rudd, *Greenery: Ecocritical readings of late medieval English literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 192.

class system condoned by the Church. We see this, for example, when the character Anima remonstrates with the wealthy clergy:

> Right so ye riche – ye robeth that ben riche,
> And helpeth hem that helpeth yow, and yyveth ther no need is; (ll. 335-336)
>
> Right so ye riche, ye robeth and fedeth
> Hem that han as ye han – hem ye make ate ese.
> (ll. 339-340)[52]

> [For you clothe the rich, help those that help you and give to folk who have plenty of everything. […] You go to great lengths to comfort the comfortably-off, and to clothe and feed people who have as much as you have.[53]]

Langland appears to be questioning the ethics of this unfair distribution of resources. It is important to remember that *Piers Plowman* was written during the time when successive years' harvests had been ruined by rain, and the poet's reference to spiritual famine refers to food shortages as well. Langland is obviously making a political point. As Rudd states, 'there is a suggestion that the land could provide enough, were people prepared both to work properly and be less greedy.'[54]

Morris obviously admired *Piers Plowman* as it appears on his list of Best Hundred Books and, according to Sparling,[55] Morris had intended to produce a Kelmscott Press edition of the poem. It is unclear when he first read the poem, although it was widely available following the publication of Thomas Whitaker's edition in 1813 and there was a revival of interest in the text, particularly among socially minded philologists, such as Frederick Furnivall,[56] in the 1840s and 1850s. Also, following a bequest in 1834 by Francis Douce, there was an illuminated manuscript of *Piers Plowman* in the Bodleian Library. Given Morris's admiration for,

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[52] William Langland, *The Vision of Piers the Plowman* ed. A.V.C. Schmidt (London: J.M.Dent, 1995), p.264.
[53] Ibid., p.189.
[54] Rudd, p.199.
[55] Sparling, p.174.
[56] Dr. Frederick Furnivall, one of the founders of the Working Men's College in 1854, lectured there on *Piers Plowman* not only because of the poem's literary significance but also because of its portrayal of working men in the fourteenth century.

and knowledge of, mediaeval manuscripts, (Walter Crane was later to remark upon Morris's 'extraordinarily rich and choice collection of […]mediaeval MSS.')[57] it is likely that he read it during his time as an undergraduate. Further evidence of its influence on Morris is the fact that he employed the literary genre of the dream-vision many times in his work, perhaps most famously in *News from Nowhere* as well as his first published tale, 'The Story of the Unknown Church'.

Although the location in Morris's story is not identified, the description of the nearby town fixes the time in the Middle Ages, most likely the thirteenth-century:

> [...] often we could see from the church yard or the Abbey garden the flash of helmets and spears, and the dim shadowy waving of banners, as knights and lords and men-at-arms passed to and fro along the battlements.[58]

The mediaeval era was not noted for its social equality, of course. People belonged to one of Three Estates, the nobility, the clergy or the commons. Those of the lowest class within the commons, serfs or villeins, were bound in virtual slavery to their feudal masters. Furthermore, this rigid tripartite class structure was endorsed by the Church, which inculcated the notion that whatever happened on earth was God's will and was therefore not to be questioned. As Gerard, Bishop of Cambrai (1012-1051), declared, 'From the beginning, mankind has been divided into three parts, among men of prayer, men of toil and men of war.'[59] It would be difficult to overstress the significance of religious belief and the role of the Church in the Middle Ages. As Hardin Craig observes 'the medieval mind seems to have been controlled by hierarchical authority and maintained by faith and ceremony.' [60] Accordingly, in the

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[57] Walter Crane, *The Decorative Illustration of Books* (London: Senate Editions, 1994), p.156.
[58] *C.W.* Vol. I. p. 150.
[59] Quoted in Paul Crossley, 'English Gothic Architecture' *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200-1400,* eds J. Alexander & P. Binski (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), p.60.
[60] Hardin Craig, *English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p.15.

'Unknown Church', Morris emphasises the significance (and wealth) of the Catholic Church in his description of the cathedral's spire:

> [...] and the spire of the Cathedral was gilt all over with gold, and always at night-time a great lamp shone from it that hung in the spire midway between the roof of the church and the cross at the top of the spire.[61]

This is also a perfect illustration of the fact that in the Middle Ages people were conditioned to raise their eyes upwards to the ecclesiastical building using the edifice as a conduit to God. This notion is characteristic of mediaeval devotional writing as well. In *Piers Plowman,* for example, the poet-dreamer falls asleep and has a marvellous dream:

> That I was in a wildernesse, wiste I nevere where.
> As I beheld into the eest an heigh to the sonne,
> I seigh a tour on a toft trieliche ymaked,
> A deep dale bynethe, a dungeon therinne,
> With depe diches and derke and dredfulle of sighte.
> A fair feeld full of folk fond I ther bitwene –
> Of all manere of men, the meene and the riche
> Werchynge and wandrynge as the world asketh.
> (ll. 12-19)[62]

> [I was in a wilderness, I could not tell where, and looking Eastwards I saw a tower high up against the sun, and splendidly built on top of a hill; and far beneath it was a great gulf, with a dungeon in it, surrounded by deep dark pits, dreadful to see. But between the tower and the gulf I saw a smooth plain, thronged with all kinds of people, high and low together moving busily about their worldly affairs.][63]

Significantly, it is Lady Holy Church who descends from a castle and explains the vision:

> 'The tour up the toft' quod she, 'Truthe is therinne,
> And wolde that ye wrought as his word techeth' (Lines 12-13)[64]

> [The Tower on the hill [i.e. the Church] is the home of Truth, and He would have you learn to obey His word.'[65]]

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[61] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.150.
[62] *Piers Plowman,* pp. 1-2.
[63] Ibid., p. 25. Translation A.V.C. Schmidt.
[64] Ibid., p.14.
[65] Ibid., p. 32.

In the 'Unknown Church', however, Morris emphasises the idea of equality within Christianity. Walter, the narrator, describes the communal cemetery by the church in which 'there are many graves [...] both of monks and of laymen'.[66] Walter's beloved sister, Margaret, and her fiancé, Amyot, are buried 'beneath the westernmost arch of the nave'.[67] The upkeep of the nave was traditionally the responsibility of the laity, although only those 'rich enough'[68] could be buried there. Morris was clearly aware of this practice for in his highly detailed essay, 'The Churches of Northern France: Shadows of Amiens' which appeared in the *OCM* in February 1856 he describes the figures around a doorway thus, ' the innermost one on either side being an angel holding a censer; the others are ecclesiastics and (some books says) benefactors to the church'.[69] The notion of equality is evident in other parts of the story as well. Amyot, Walter's friend who goes off to fight in the war, is not, for example, a mere foot soldier:

> [...] I remember how his hand left mine at last, and then, some one looking back at me earnestly as they all rode on together – looking back, with his hand on the *saddle* behind him [70] (italics mine).

Amyot is on horseback and so is almost certainly a knight and, as the historian Sir Frank Stenton points out, even ordinary knights of small means were, '[...] in social position [...] indistinguishable from the lords who held immediately of the king, and in the language of the time they, like the king's own military tenants, were recognised as barons.'[71] The relationship between Walter, the master-mason, and Amyot, the knight, appears, however, to be based on shared values, mutual affection and respect and is untainted by any disparity in social status.

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[66] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.151.
[67] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.158.
[68] Crossley, p.67.
[69] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.355.
[70] *C.W*. Vol.1, p.156.
[71] Sir Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p.636.

This camaraderie reflects the ideals of the Brotherhood that Morris had formed at Oxford. It is true that its formation, like that of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, was inspired to a large extent by the chivalric ideals found in the Arthurian romances, which were courage, loyalty, honour, mercifulness to an opponent (as well as exquisite and elaborate manners), but renown had to be *earned* by noble deeds and purity of heart, however, not automatically acquired by birth or rank.

Male cameraderie also features in 'Gertha's Lovers', a tale which presages Morris's later works based on the Icelandic sagas. It was possibly inspired by his reading of Benjamin Thorpe's *Northern Mytholgy* (1851), particularly the legend of Olaf, the eleventh-century saint and King of Norway. Morris's story, which appeared in the July and August editions of the *OCM,* is set in an unnamed mediaeval land which is both beautiful and fertile and, significantly, unspoilt by humans. It is:

> [...] a fair country and good to live in, rich with wealth of golden corn, beautiful with many woods, watered by great rivers and pleasant trickling streams; moreover, one extremity of it was bounded by the washing of the purple waves, and the other by the solemn watchfulness of the purple mountains.[72]

Despite being a commoner, Gertha is an exceptional figure. She 'was very beautiful: nor merely so, but grand and queenlike also: such a woman as might inspire a whole people to any deed of wise daring for her love.'[73] In this tale, King Olaf falls in love with Gertha and she is made queen after he dies in battle. The practice of a powerful man forming a marriage *du haut en bas* was not unusual in the Middle Ages, as indeed since, if the object of his desire was young and attractive. (In Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale,* for example, the beautiful Griselda is elevated in social status from a simple peasant to a queen.) Gertha's beauty inspires the love of both the king and his faithful friend, Leuchnar, yet it is her nobility that attracts the king. In his portrayal

[72] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.176.
[73] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.176

of Gertha, Morris is employing moral and spiritual sensibilities common to mediaeval literature where outer beauty was seen as a signifier of inner beauty (or goodness). Conversely, a fallen woman was often portrayed naked or in stained and torn clothing, a symbol of her sinful character.[74] In his book *Beauty in the Middle Ages* (1959), Umberto Eco observes that:

> [...] medieval discussions of non-sensible beauty gave rise to theories of sensible beauty as well. They established analogies and parallels between them or made deductions about one from premises supplied by the other.[75]

Interestingly, Morris uses this *topos* in his descriptions of the male characters in 'Gertha's Lovers' as well. Olaf is aristocratic and noble, and 'so wise, yet so beautiful that he moved like the moving of music; such tenderness looked from his eyes, so lovingly the morning sun and the sweet morning haze touched the waves of his golden hair.'[76] Contrastingly, Leuchnar is socially, intellectually and physically inferior. He is smaller both 'in body and face and it seemed in mind and heart also.'[77] Olaf knows that Leuchnar also loves Gertha and wonders whether he should pursue her or allow his friend to woo her instead. In the passage below, Olaf reveals his royal status: he could claim Gertha for his own but, magnanimously, he allows Leuchnar to court her, unchallenged. As one of his subjects, Gertha's fate is in Olaf's hands. The king acknowledges the potential problems created by a union with a peasant's daughter but, significantly, he recognises that she is far more suited to the throne than he is himself:

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[74] In Chrètien de Troyes' *Story of the Grail* (c.1180), for example, the hapless maiden who is forcibly kissed by Perceval and deprived of her 'ring', is branded wicked by her own lover and told 'you shall not change the clothes you're wearing, but will follow me naked and on foot.' Chrètien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances,* ed. William W. Kibler (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 391.

[75] Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages* trans. Hugh Bredin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 5.

[76] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.179.

[77] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.180.

> "So Leuchnar loves her [...] and I love her. Well, it will change his life, I think; let him have her; poor fellow! He has not got many to love him. Besides, she is a peasant's daughter; I am a great king. Yet is she nobler than I am, for all my kingship. Alas, I fear the people, not for myself, but for her; they will not understand her nobility; they will only see that which comes uppermost, her seeming wisdom, her seeming goodness, which, perchance will not show to be much greater than other women's as queen's ought to do."[78]

This disregard for inherited social position is underscored by the fact that Olaf *earned* his throne: he 'remembered how he was made king'.[79] This is an early intimation of Morris's later (Marxist) preference for the communal structure of early Mediæval Germanic and Anglo-Saxon society over the hegemony exercised by the later Norman *seigneurs* (Germanic rulers were elected until the Napoleonic era).In this utopian tale, Olaf and Gertha are noble, compassionate characters, in contrast to King Borace, who attacks this unnamed 'fair country'.[80] Whilst the invading emperor drives 'his serf-soldiers with whip and sword-point', [81] Olaf's concern for his people is paramount: 'for through his unselfishness he had gained that mighty power of sympathy for others, which no fiercest passion can altogether put aside.'[82]

The sense of duty towards one's community as well as to individuals, such as family members, is exemplified in another story published in the *OCM, '*Svend and his Brethren'. In this tale, two lovers, Cissela and Suir, are cruelly separated when Cissela is given in marriage to the leader of the invading forces. The notion of duty and its attendant self-sacrifice permeates Morris's entire canon, particularly his later Nordic works, and it was clearly extremely important to him, even at this early stage. In his review of Browning's *Men and Women,* which appeared in the *OCM* early in 1856, Morris wrote of the poem *Childe Roland,* for example, that:

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[78] C.W. Vol. I, p.183.
[79] Ibid., p.185.
[80] Ibid., p.176.
[81] Ibid., p.192.
[82] Ibid., p.185.

> [...] for [...] [Browning's] [...] real design was to show us a brave man doing his duty, making his way on to his point through all dreadful things. What do all these horrors matter to him? He must go on, they cannot stop him; he will be slain certainly, who knows by what unheard-of death; yet he can leave all this in God's hands, and go forward, for it will all come right at the end […] Do you not feel as you read, a strange sympathy for the lonely knight, so very, very lonely, not allowed even the fellowship of kindly memories.[83]

In the above lines Morris delineates his belief that the most important thing for people is a sense of fellowship. Furthermore, all individuals, even aristocrats, must do their duty by behaving selflessly for the benefit of the whole community.

(ii) The portrayal of women

Morris's portrayal of his female characters in his early contributions to the *OCM* displays a clear empathy and admiration for women but this is often tempered by societal dictates. In the 'Unknown Church', for example, the narrator's sister Margaret is a stone mason, like her brother. One is given the impression, however, that she does not quite enjoy equal status with her male sibling. Walter relates that whilst he was working, '*beneath* me my sister Margaret was carving at the flower-work, & the little quatrefoils that carry the signs of the zodiac and emblems of the months'.[84] This disparity may, of course, be due to differences in skill levels and experience and the relationship between the elder brother and the younger sister may, in this context, be similar to that of master and apprentice. It is noteworthy, however, that this lack of parity echoes the subordinate position of women in the firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Company (later Morris & Co.) founded in 1861. The women employed there had, in the majority of cases, some familial connection with the male founders of the business, such as Charles Faulkner's sisters Lucy and

[83] *C.W*. Vol. I, p.339.
[84] Ibid., p.152. Italics mine.

Kate, and were highly skilled in the production of embroideries, hand-painted tiles and other craftwork. As the art critic Clarence M. Cook observed in 1875:

> Some of the ladies belonging to the families of the house of Morris, Marshall & Company have distinguished themselves by the beauty and originality of their designs and no less by the excellence of their workmanship; and they have become important members of the business, their work and their taste having not a little to do with the success of the enterprise.[85]

The women, however, followed designs sketched by the men (Burne-Jones for example) and did not have any real artistic freedom or autonomy. Furthermore, they never became partners in the firm, despite their undisputed contribution to the success of the business.

This apparently inferior status of women is reflected in Morris's 'Unknown Church' as, when Amyot (Walter's friend and Margaret's fiancé) returns from war and is lying on his death bed, the relationship between the two male friends is given more prominence than that of the two lovers. Although Margaret's presence at the bedside is secondary to that of her brother's (she kneels quietly beside Walter as he stands so close to his friend that his hair touches Amyot's face), it is essential in order to legitimise the male friendship. As is often the case in feudal tales, the bond between the two men is deep, lasting, intense and certainly homo-social: the presence, albeit distant, of a female lover for Amyot prevents any suggestion of homosexuality, however. Frederick Kirchhoff argues that 'the homoerotic element in Walter's relationship with Amyot is explicit',[86] and Walter's words about him are those more suited to lovers than friends: 'And it was like a dream that he should

[85] Emma Ferry, 'The Other Miss Faulkner', *JWMS* Vol. 18.1, (Summer 2011), pp. 47-61, (p. 49).
[86] Frederick Kirchhoff, *The Construction of a Male Self, 1856-1872* (Athens, GA: Ohio University Press, 1990), p.35.

leave me, for he had said that we would always be together; but he went away, and now he has come back again.'[87]

This close male camaraderie reflects Morris's own experience with the members of his Oxford 'Set' during his time as an undergraduate, as well as his fascination with the Middle Ages. Kirchhoff further contends that Morris conceptualised his Oxford circle as a quasi-monastic brotherhood and that he 'imagined himself the member of a community that could replace the sexual and power relationships of Victorian adulthood.'[88] Certainly, according to MacCarthy, in 1853 with Morris's enthusiastic moral and financial support, Burne-Jones had planned to form 'a religious community of male clerical and lay members working in the heart of London.'[89] Although it never came to fruition, the notion of a celibate fraternity inspired by Arthurian chivalry (with Sir Galahad as its patron) was central to Morris's thinking during his years at Oxford. The importance of his male friendships and his own chastity is demonstrated by this extract from a letter to his mother in November 1855:

> […] besides your money has by no means been thrown away, if the love of friends faithful and true, first seen and loved here, if this love is something priceless, and not to be bought again anywhere and by any means: if moreover by living here and seeing evil and sin in its foulest and coarsest forms, as one does day by day, I have learned to hate any form of sin, and wish to fight against it, is not this well too?[90]

It is true that this letter was written to ameliorate his mother's disappointment following his decision to abandon a career in the Church and, therefore, Morris may have chosen to accentuate the morally improving nature of his undergraduate experience. The most affectionate and enduring friendships that Morris formed at

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[87] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.156.
[88] Kirchhoff, p.24.
[89] Fiona MacCarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite: Edward Burne-Jones and the Victorian Imagination* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 2011), p.37.
[90] *Letters,* Vol. I, p.15.

Oxford were, however, with like-minded men. He certainly did not associate with the more rowdy youth whom MacCarthy describes as, 'brash young men who rowed and hunted, ate and drank intrepidly.'[91] Furthermore, Morris had not yet formed any heterosexual attachments and he was still to meet Jane Burden, his future wife. There is no evidence that, prior to his marriage, his relationships with women were anything more than platonic. However, there is no way of knowing for certain that much about Morris's early sexual history. As MacCarthy notes, throughout his life Morris was 'notably, even unnaturally, reticent on sexual questions'.[92]

In 'Gertha's Lovers', however, it initially appears that the heroine is a far more significant character than that of Margaret in the 'Unknown Church'. Gertha is a peasant although she becomes queen and has not one, but, two, noble male suitors. Nevertheless, as in the 'Unknown Church', it is the relationship between the two men which takes precedence. King Olaf says to his friend and knight, Leuchnar, that 'whatever happens we must be brothers'.[93] Furthermore, Gertha's rule is short-lived. She recognises that she was only a conduit for the *puissance* of the late King Olaf and that his people rallied around her solely to defeat the invaders:

> I am but Gertha, the peasant's daughter, and I know it was only the spirit of your dead lord working in me that made you love me so. But if I were queen for long I should come to be only Gertha again; so I must go.[94]

It was universally acknowledged in the Middle Ages that men were superior to women in both body and soul and, therefore, they (men) had a right to rule society. Exceptions to this belief were, however, situations such as Gertha's, where a widow ruled in succession to her husband. As Veronica Sekules states, 'Even Christine de Pisan, the French writer who early in the fifteenth century espoused the cause of

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[91] *The Last Pre-Raphaelite,* p.29.
[92] MacCarthy, p. 188.
[93] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.189
[94] Ibid., p.223

women, accepted that women were subservient to men and that only exceptionally, usually in widowhood, were they allowed to take power.'[95] This androcentric view of society is often cited by eco-feminists as a corollary to the anthropocentric belief that humans are superior to nature, and therefore, entitled to use or exploit nature for their own ends. In other words, men dominate both women and nature. As Victoria Davion argues, 'women have been associated with nature, the material, the emotional and the particular, while men have been associated with culture, the non-material, the rational and the abstract.'[96] In these early stories many of the female characters (Margaret and Gertha for example) have admirable qualities but still never achieve an equal status with men.

In Morris's tale 'Svend and his Brethren' (August 1856), the heroine Cissela is similarly subject to male domination. Like 'Gertha's Lovers', this story was inspired by Thorpe's Nordic myths, specifically those pertaining to the fourteenth-century king of Denmark, Valdemar IV,[97] who, when his wife Tovelille died, was so grief-stricken that he was unable to leave her corpse 'but had it carried with him whithersoever he went'[98] (Similarly, Morris's character Valdemar would not leave his wife's tomb and died with his head still resting on the 'shoulder of the marble queen').[99] In 'Svend and his Brethen', as in 'Gertha's Lovers', a peaceful and idyllic 'free land'[100] is invaded by the forces of a powerful enemy and, in order to avoid total destruction, the people of this country sacrifice the lovely maiden, Cissela, as

[95] Veronica Sekules, 'Women and Art in England in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries'. *The Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200-1400* eds. J. Alexander & P. Binski (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1987), pp. 39-51, (p. 41).
[96] Victoria Davion, 'Is ecofeminism feminist'. *Ecological Feminism* ed. K. Warren ed., (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 9.
[97] Valdemar IV of Denmark who reigned from 1334 to 1375 was the last male descendant of King Svend Estrithson, the nephew of Cnut the Great.
[98] Benjamin Thorpe, *Northern Mytholgy* Vol. 2 (Leipzig: Forgotten Books, 2011), p.199.
[99] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.240.
[100] Ibid., p.228.

bride to the invading King Waldemar. Cissela and Valdemar have seven sons, 'Svend and his Brethren', who learn much from Siur, the blacksmith, Cissela's former lover, who follows her *incognito* to her new home. After the death of their parents, Svend and his brothers, accused of murdering their father and conspiring with their mother (whom the people believe to be a witch), are driven from the land. Significantly, noble Cissela, the 'Peace-Queen', is robed in purple, the colour symbolic of both penance and royalty, as she is led from her idyllic homeland of 'pine-shadowed mountains' to be 'crowned queen in the dreary marble palace, whose outer walls rose right up from the weary-hearted sea.'[101] Cissela has no autonomy for just as King Valdemar seized her country, so too he takes possession of her.

The portrayal of women in these early tales does not seem, perhaps, to support the idea of Morris as a proto-feminist. Before she became queen, for example, Gertha's role, unlike that of Margaret, is the traditional domestic one. She kept house for her father Sigurd, worked with her needle and thought of 'other matters as women use'.[102] Indeed, much later, in Morris's socialist utopia *News from Nowhere,* the characters are assigned roles largely on the basis of gender (a notable exception being Philipa, the stonemason), a fact which disappoints many feminists. As Jan Marsh has noted: 'it offers a too-masculine viewpoint, conjuring a harmonious world of decorative, contented women and active, interesting men.'[103] The riposte to this argument is that Morris did not regard domestic duties as having less value than any other employment. In the Middle Ages the work of men and women was complementary, not hierarchical: men produced raw materials outdoors

[101] *C.W*. Vol. I, p.234.
[102] Ibid., p.176.
[103] Jan Marsh, 'Concerning Love: News from Nowhere and Gender'. *William Morris & News from Nowhere: A Vision for Our Time* eds. S. Coleman & Paddy O'Sullivan (Bideford: Green Books, 1990), p.113.

and women processed the materials indoors. The notion of work within the domestic sphere as a worthy craft is reflected in the words of the old sage, Hammond, when he says to William Guest in *News from Nowhere, '* don't you know that it is a great pleasure to a clever woman to manage a house skilfully, and to do it so that all the house-mates about her look pleased, and are grateful to her?'[104] He does, however, follow this rhetorical question with the somewhat patronising statement that 'everybody likes to be ordered about by a pretty woman.'[105]

As a stonemason, Margaret's role is less conventional than that of Gertha prior to her marriage. Nevertheless, Margaret and Gertha share similar fates. They both follow their men to the grave, with their relationships never having been consummated. The motif of lovers being united in death is one which recurs throughout literature, but Morris's paradoxical treatment of the female characters here is nevertheless interesting. Sharing quasi-equal status with their male counterparts, the roles of Margaret and Gertha are largely symbolic. They have no real power or autonomy but function, like the ladies in courtly romance, as idealized figures around whom men rally and bond.

This apparent dichotomy may be in part due to Morris's relationships with women in his childhood. He was brought up in a household dominated by women. His father was largely absent throughout Morris's childhood as he travelled into the City of London to work every day. Morris's mother Emma effectively managed the household which included servants and governesses and, in addition, she had to cope with pregnancy and childbirth which was, for her, a biennial event. Consequently, Morris spent much of his formative years under the care and supervision of his two elder sisters, Emma and Henrietta and, therefore, came to

[104] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.60.
[105] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.60.

associate women with both competence and power. Furthermore, there is no evidence that, at the time the *OCM* was published, Morris's relationships with women had been anything other than platonic. It is, perhaps, an overstatement to say, as Kirchhoff does, that Morris's early writing 'reflects a mind obsessed with erotic failure',[106] but the elusiveness of the relationships between his male and female characters suggests that he is uncertain of his masculinity and unfamiliar and ill at ease with sexual relations.

The patriarchal view of women, then, was based around female stereotypes, 'The Angel in the House', 'The Fallen Woman', 'The Seductress', 'The Madwoman' and 'The Criminal' and the notion that men and women occupied, as Robert Gilmour has noted, 'separate and complementary spheres'.[107] The philosopher and social commentator John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), for example, wrote of men and women that, 'each has what the other has not: each completes the other, and is completed by the other: they are nothing alike, and the happiness and perfection of both depends on each asking and receiving from the other what the other only can give.'[108] Put simply, Morris was sexually inexperienced and, therefore, found it difficult to write about the consummation of heterosexual love. Critics such as Jack Lindsay,[109] for instance, have argued that the fascination with the rejected lover 'ennobled by the tribulations of his unrequited passion'[110] in Morris's writing stems from his perceived 'rejection' as a child firstly by his mother, as her time was devoted to Morris's ever increasing number of younger siblings, and then, later, his elder sister, Emma, whose marriage in 1850 to Joseph Oldham 'deprived' Morris of a

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[106] Kirchhoff, p.8.
[107] Robert Gilmour, *The Victorian Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature 1830-1890* (New York: Longmans, 1993), p. 190.
[108] John Stuart Mill, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* Vol. XVIII ed. J.M. Robson and others (Toronto: Routledge, 1963-1991), p.121.
[109] Lindsay, p.40.
[110] Silver, p.11.

much loved *confidante.* Arguably, Oldham was Morris's first male rival. Lindsay's contention is consistent with current psychoanalytical theory concerning the significance of childhood experiences on the development of the adult self. As the leading psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut has argued:

> The experiences during the period of the formation of the Self become the prototype of the specific forms of our later vulnerability and security in the narcissistic realm; the ups and downs in our self; of our lesser or greater need for praise, for merger into idealized figures and for other forms of narcissistic sustenance.[111]

It is certainly true that the erotic love triangle is a recurring subject throughout Morris's writings, 'Frank's Sealed Letter' (*OCM* April) and 'Svend and his Brethren' (*OCM* August), for example. Morris's earliest employment of the love-triangle, however, was some two years before the publication of the *OCM* in 'The Three Flowers' (c.1854), a poem which was not discovered until after Morris's death. The following is a short extract:

> Tiger lilies, tall white lilies,
> In the summer grow together,
> Gorgeous golden daffodillies
> In the spring grow lovely ever.
> Yet the daffodils clung round me,
> Yet she hung them round my brow;
> Yet a child she said she loved me,
> Yet I know she loves me now.
> He was very noble surely,
> Very much did I love him,
> And they loved each other surely,
> Never will this love grow dim. (ll. 17-28)[112]

Lindsay considers this poem to be autobiographical in its expression of rejection felt by a brother when his sister falls in love. This is a credible hypothesis as Morris was certainly very close to his sister and greatly admired her husband, Joseph Oldham:

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[111] Heinz Kohut, *The Search for the Self: Selected Writings, 1950-78* ed. Paul H. Ornstein (New York: International Universities Press, 1978), p 224.
[112] Lindsay, p.31.

possibly his early choice of a profession in the Church was influenced by them both. It may also, however, as Florence Boos argues, 'be an over-elaborate intrusion in the fantasy of a thoughtful and imaginative adolescent.'[113] The three flowers of the poem's title, two white lilies, symbolic of the chaste lovers, and a solitary daffodil (the narrator) are arguably related to the erotic triangles of Morris's *OCM* tales and, possibly, his own early experience, too. However, as Boos contends:

> The poem's main motive is of rejection and loneliness, transformed by self-acceptance into compassion and fatalistic eroticism. Evocations of flowers overwhelm the poem's descriptions of loneliness, love rejection, and grief for the dead. The smothering presence of flowers in the early poems would suggest that to the young Morris flowers were not marginal decoration but true emblems of significant human experience.[114]

Deep empathy with nature, self-abnegation and stoicism in the face of loss are themes which pervaded Morris's entire canon. It is extremely interesting, therefore, to see them already in this adolescent poem.

(iii) The importance of rewarding work

Almost two decades after the publication of the *OCM,* in his essay 'Useful Work Versus Useless Toil' (1884), Morris expanded his views on the importance of satisfactory work and restorative rest for all people. He pointed out the inequities which made the working class labour so hard that they were unable to enjoy their short periods of rest and, thus, were 'worse off than mere beasts of the field.'[115]
It is also possible to discern Morris's thoughts on the value of fulfilling labour in some of his stories published in the *OCM.*

In the 'Unknown Church', for example, Walter (the narrator) takes great pride in his craft. He mentions that he carved all the bas-reliefs in the west front of the

[113] Florence Boos, 'The Early Poems of William Morris: Before *The Defence of Guenevere'* http://morrisedition.lib.uiowa.edu/earlypoemspreface.html pp.1-13.
[114] Boos, 'The Early Poems of William Morris: Before *The Defence of Guenevere'*, pp.1-13.
[115] C.W. Vol. XXIII, p.100.

church with his own hand and, indeed, when he is found dead he is still holding his chisel. Furthermore, Walter's work on the rebuilding of the church is for the communal good as well as his own. He recalls how, when the church was nearly finished, 'the monks for whom we were building the church, and the people, who lived in the town hard by, crowded round us often-times to watch us carving'.[116]

In 'Svend and his Brethren', Cissela's lover Siur makes a great sacrifice by secretly leaving his homeland in order to watch over her. In so doing, Siur abandons a life of privilege as, in his own country, he is evidently one of the nobility. However, he earns great respect as an artisan in Valdemar's land and even the seven young princes wish to emulate his skill as a blacksmith. When his beloved Cissela dies, Siur lovingly carves her tomb and makes suits of armour for her sons. Like Walter in the 'Unknown Church', Siur takes pride in his work :

> Siur […] saw a fair sight, the work of his own hands [...] seven thrones and behind them a cloth of purple wrought with golden stars, barred across from right to left with long bars of silver and crimson, and edged below with melancholy, fading green, like a September sunset; and opposite each throne was a glittering suit of armour wrought wonderfully in bright steel, except that on the breast of each suit was a face worked marvellously in enamel, the face of Cissela in a glory of golden hair; and the glory of that gold spread away from the breast on all sides, and ran cunningly along with steel rings in such a way as it is hard even to imagine: [...] and by each suit lay a gleaming sword terrible to look at, steel from pommel to point.[117]

This detailed description of the 'golden' thrones and 'glittering' armour for the young princes accentuates the smith's skill. Lonely and exiled, Siur loses both Cissela, and the fellowship of his countrymen. He is compensated in part, however, by the pleasure he derives in making beautiful and useful things.

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[116] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.149.
[117] Ibid., p.240.

The idea of satisfactory work is also present in 'Gertha's Lovers'. The heroine is the 'daughter of a mere peasant'[118] who fought for his country when required but who also enjoyed working on the land. Gertha's father Sigurd is described as 'a tiller of the kind soil' and a 'fisher in the silver waters of the river'.[119] As in the 'Unknown Church', there is here a sense of immersion in the natural world.

It is worth noting as well that although Morris's later craft and design work is often associated with the Aesthetic Movement of the second half of the nineteenth century, he himself was contemptuous of the movement and its motto, *Art for Art's Sake*. The idea that art should only be available to a small élite was anathema to Morris, who believed that art was not only 'Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting, in the narrow sense of those words'[120] but also included what he termed the 'Decorative Arts', crafts such as joinery, pottery, weaving and glass-making. In his lecture 'The Lesser Arts' (1877) Morris emphasised the centrality of all decorative art and crafts to the well-being of society:

> These arts [...] are part of a great system invented for the expression of man's delight in beauty: all peoples and times have used them; they have been the joy of free nations, and the solace of oppressed nations; [...]best of all, they are the sweeteners of human labour, both to the handicraftsman, whose life is spent working in them, and to people in general who are influenced by the sight of them [...] they make our toil happy, our rest fruitful.[121]

This practical, egalitarian notion of art was completely opposed to the elitist ethos of the Aesthetic Movement. In his book *The Aesthetic Adventure* (1945) William Gaunt concludes that:

> The 'aesthetic man' recognised no duties, pursued no interests, save those of art [...and…] was indifferent to religion, morality, education, political principle or social improvement […] Thus the aesthetic movement

[118] Ibid., p.176.
[119] *C.W.* Vol. I, p. 176.
[120] *C.W.* Vol. XXII, p.4.
[121] Ibid., p.8.

> was fundamentally selfish. […] William Morris, believing that everyone had the capacity of an artist, that all happy work was a form of art, could not but be antagonistic to the mystic cult of an irresponsible 'genius'.[122]

Morris believed that everyone was entitled to rewarding work and that occupations such as carpentry or fishing were crafts to be valued as much as Art.

(iv) The importance of nature and the environment.

From an early age, Morris had a deep love of nature and this is reflected throughout his entire canon. He was, of course, not the first writer to demonstrate in his work an appreciation for the natural world. *Piers Plowman,* for example, a poem Morris admired greatly, is more than a spiritual and political work, as the following passage demonstrates:

> And sithen cam Kynde
> And nempned me by my name, and bad my nemen hede,
> And thorugh the wondres of this world wit for to take.
> And on a mountaigne that Myddelerthe highte, as me tho thoughte,
> I was fet forth by ensaumples to knowe,
> Thorugh ech creature, Kynde my creator to lovye.
> I seigh the sonne and the see and the sond after,
> And where that brides and beestes by hir make thei yeden
> Wilde wormes in wodes, and wonderful foweles
> With flecked fetheres and of fele colours.
> Man and his make I myghte se bothe;
> Pverte and plentee, bothe pees and were
> Blisse and bale-bothe I seigh at ones,
> And hoe men token Mede and Mercy refused.[123]
> (ll. 320-333)

> [Then Nature approached me, calling me by my name; and he bade me take heed, and gather wisdom from all the wonders of the world. And I dreamt that he led me out on a mountain called Middle-Earth, so that I might learn from all kinds of creatures and love my Creator. And I saw the sun and the sea, and the sandy shores, and the places where birds and beasts go forth with their mates – wild snakes in the woods, and wonderful birds whose feathers were flecked with many colours. And I could also see man and his mate, in poverty and in plenty, in peace and

[122] William Gaunt, *The Aesthetic Adventure* (Oxford: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1945), p.215.
[123] *Piers Plowman,* p. 182.

> war; and I saw how men lived in happiness and misery both at once, and how they took money, and refused mercy.][124]

In the above lines, Langland's description of the physical landscape also refers to social and spiritual ones as well. Nature exhorts Piers to look around him and learn from the wonders of the world. The poet evokes an idyllic view of nature where 'wonderful' birds with colourful plumage and all animals thrive in a world warmed by the sun. This peaceful picture of creatures living with their mates is then juxtaposed with the description of 'man and his mate' who live in peace and war, in poverty and in plenty and in happiness and misery. The reference to taking money makes the poet's implication clear: humankind's greed is the cause of its unhappiness. Just as Kynde[125] guides the protagonist in the poem, however, mankind has much to learn from nature . As Rudd observes:

> Understanding ourselves as constituent parts of a wider whole and further appreciating that this means that our actions have consequences for all other elements of the world is part of the notion of interconnectedness that is central to green thinking. That is that species and elements that seem distinct are in fact bound by a web of connections, each dependent on others to greater or lesser degrees. None is truly able to function without the other, or at least not for long.[126]

The centrality of nature to human existence is also seen in the tales Morris published in the *OCM.* In the 'Unknown Church', for example, the ecclesiastical building is surrounded not by a stone wall, but by a large garden and a circle of poplar trees:

> [...] in the garden were trellises covered over with roses, and convolvus, and the great-leaved fiery nasturtium; and specially all along by the poplar trees were there trellises, but on these grew nothing but deep crimson roses; and hollyhocks too were all out in blossom at that time, great spires of pink, and orange, and red, and white, with their soft downy leaves. I said that nothing grew on the trellises by the poplars but crimson roses

[124] Ibid., p.136.
[125] According to Gillian Rudd, the word 'Kynde' may mean character, genus, natural world, or may be used to denote Nature as a regent of God, or even God in his role as Creator. Rudd, p.193.
[126] Ibid., pp. 6-7.

> but I was not quite right, for in many places the wild flowers had crept into the garden from without; lush green briony, with green-white blossoms, that grows so fast, one could almost think that we see it grow, and deadly nightshade, La bella donna, oh! so beautiful; red berry, and purple, yellow-spiked flower, and deadly, cruel-looking, dark green leaf, all growing together in the glorious days of early autumn.[127]

In this vivid description of the garden Morris evokes an image of a fertile space, teeming with brightly coloured flora. The above passage also reveals how important nature was to Morris. Later, in 1891, Morris was to say 'Copy Nature and you will produce something which at all events is worth people's attention.'[128] Like the Romantic poets he so admired, Morris invokes the beauty of nature to heighten the mood as the narrator describes this idyllic period from his past. Morris's language is sensuous: the nasturtiums are a passionate 'fiery red' and the roses, 'crimson'. His description of the 'great spires' of brightly coloured hollyhocks is also highly suggestive of the fecundity of nature. Morris's aesthetic response to nature, however, was not merely escapist, a reaction to the commodification culture of his time but, rather, as Kate Soper states, a 'reminder of, or utopian gesture toward, a world in which humanity would enjoy a harmonious and egalitarian existence.'[129] In the above extract, Morris is expressing a desire for a future where the environment is unspoiled by industrialisation and hedonistic consumerism.

The ekphrastic quality of Morris's prose is also redolent of mediaeval illuminated manuscripts such as *The Romance of The Rose* (Harl. M.S.S 4425),[130] whose borders were often decorated with intertwined flowers, fruit and foliage. According to Michaela Braesel, Morris regarded the Harley manuscript as a

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[127] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.151.

[128] May Morris, *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist.* Vol 1 (London: Russell & Russell, 1936), p.298.

[129] Kate Soper, 'Passing Glories and Romantic Retrievals: Avant-Garde Nostalgia and Hedonist Renewal' *Eco-critical Theory: New European Approaches* eds. Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), p.21.

[130] *The Romance of the Rose* was a great favourite of the Pre-Raphaelites. In the 1870s Burne-Jones designed a 'Romance of the Rose' cycle which was later woven at Merton Abbey. (Figure 5).

'visualisation of the late-medieval world' and the detailed naturalism of the illuminations 'provided him with the inspiration for finding poetic similes.'[131] This passage also evokes Morris's later fabric and wallpaper designs, many of which illustrate an harmonious relationship between craft and nature. Jed Mayer suggests, for example, that Morris's *Trellis* (1864) portrays 'an ethic of natural stewardship' which brings order to, but does not dominate, nature.[132] Additionally, the above extract illustrates Morris's appreciation for, and knowledge of, wild as well as cultivated plants. Here the man-made garden (which is always central to mediaeval romance as the locus for lovers' trysts) and nature are intertwined. It is, however, the harmony between the man-made architecture and nature which is most striking. The earth in this story is 'beautiful in summer, when the blue sky looked so much bluer, if you could hem a piece of it between the new white-carving; beautiful in the starry nights, so solemn that it almost reached agony - the awe and joy one had in their great beauty.'[133] The building of the Church enhances the beauty of the natural world; it does not destroy or mar it. Years later, in 'The Lesser Arts' (1877), Morris was to articulate his belief that architecture should be sympathetic to the natural environment. He lamented that this was no longer the case in the cities of England, but went on to note that:

> […] when we can get beyond that smoky world, there, out in the country, we may still see the works of our fathers yet alive amidst the very nature they were wrought into, and of which they are so completely a part. For there indeed if anywhere, in the English country, in the days when people cared about such things, was there a full sympathy between the works of man, and the land they were made for.[134]

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[131] Michaela Braesel, 'The Influence of Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts on the Pre-Raphaelites and the early Poetry of William Morris'. *JWMS,* Vol. 15.4 (Summer 2004), pp. 41-54.
[132] Jed Mayer, 'William Morris and the greening of science.' *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies,* 17 (2008) pp. 57-76. (Figure 6).
[133] *C.W*. Vol. I, p.149.
[134] *C.W*. Vol. XXII, p. 17.

In the above passage Morris is not merely engaging in idealistic nostalgia for a past bucolic age. It is true that he had a tendency always to view nineteenth-century society through the prism of the Middle Ages but he did so with a thorough knowledge of the realities of mediaeval life. Morris did not advocate a return to the cruelty and violence of the past, but he did regret the fact that people of his era no longer lived in symbiosis with nature. He lamented the fact that contemporary society was becoming more and more urban and, hence, completely divorced from the natural world. Instead of using only those resources that were necessary for life, the environment was being decimated by the productivist nature of the Victorian industrial economy.

(v) The folly of materialism

In Morris's contributions to the *OCM* there are numerous references to what could be described as the folly of materialism. In *Gertha's Lovers*, for example, the avaricious King Borace invades a peaceful nation spoiling the landscape and destroying the lives of its inhabitants. The story could be read as an allegory for the threat that capitalism and industrialisation posed (and continue to pose) to the countryside. Such a reading would, possibly, have been rejected by Morris considering his later views, however. In 1895, an anonymous critic advanced the theory that Morris's novel *The Wood Beyond the World* was a political allegory, observing that:

> It is borne in upon us that the Lady who raises false lions in the path, and allures the King's Son and the Merchant's Son with her honied words and false kisses, is a worse sorceress than Medea or Circe; she is the Lady Meed of Langland's vision; she personifies Capital itself, just as the Maid whom she holds captive personifies Labour. Mr Morris preaches his Socialism in the utmost seductive and poetical form, and ends his story in a Utopia where Labour and the Merchant's Son […] are the sovereign

> powers [...] and Capital with her creature, the bloated aristocrat, has come to a bad end.[135]

Following this review, Morris wrote to the editor of *The Spectator* and stated, 'I had not the least intention of thrusting an allegory into *The Wood Beyond the World;* it is meant for a tale pure and simple, with nothing didactic about it. If I have to write or speak on social problems, I always try and be as direct as I possibly can be.'[136] Morris seems to articulate a somewhat antithetical view in his review of Robert Browning's *Men and Women* which appeared in the *OCM* in March 1856, however. With reference to Browning's 'grand' poem 'Childe Roland', Morris writes that:

> Some reviewer thinks it is an allegory, and rates the poet for not having told us what happened to Childe Roland inside the 'round, squat turret.' Well, it may be some sort of allegory, *for in a certain sense everything is so, or almost everything that is done on this earth.*[137]
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> (italics mine)

' Gertha's Lovers' may not be an explicit allegory, but it is possible that Morris's nascent concerns about the despoliation of England by industrialisation are being expressed, albeit subconsciously in this work. Much later in his political lectures and essays, Morris was to use the analogy of war (with distinctly mediaeval overtones) to illustrate the destruction of the countryside by capitalism and its inherent pursuit of profit. In his lecture 'How We Live and How We Might Live' (1884), Morris criticised the political power wielded by capitalists:

> [...] war is the very breath of the nostrils of these fighting firms, and they have now, in our times, got it into their hands nearly all the political power, and they band together in each country in order to make their respective governments fulfil just two functions: the first is at home to act as a strong

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[135] Peter Faulkner, *William Morris: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p.383.
It is interesting to note that this reviewer cited Lady Meed from Langland's *Piers the Plowman*. She represents the power of the purse and, as such, is the very antithesis of Lady Holy Church. According to William Benzie, Langland's influential poem was admired for its 'full appreciation of social history' by the Christian Socialists who founded the Working Men's College in 1854. William Benzie, *Dr F.J. Furnival* (Oklahoma City: Pilgrim Books, 1983), p.52.

[136] Philip Henderson, *The Letters Of William Morris To His Family And Friends* (London: Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., 1950), pp. 370-1.

[137] *C.W*. Vol. I, p.339.

> police force to keep the ring in which the strong are beating down the weak; the second is to act as a piratical body-guard abroad, a petard to explode the doors which lead to the markets of the world.[138]

According to Morris, it is the profit motive of capitalism that destroys the environment because it:

> [...] draws men into enormous unmanageable aggregations called towns, for instance; profit which crowds them up when they are there into quarters without gardens or open spaces; profit which won't take the most ordinary precautions against wrapping a whole district in a cloud of sulphurous smoke; which turns beautiful rivers into filthy sewers;[139]

It is no surprise, therefore, that Morris's early tales contain explicit descriptions of a land laid waste by the consequences of human greed. In 'Svend and his Brethren', Valdemar's land is littered with grand marble palaces, his people erudite and he has a great army of 'gold-clothed'[140] knights. In order to amass these things, however, Valdemar and the gentry have destroyed the landscape and exploited the proletariat, as this short extract shows:

> The mountains were cloven, and gave forth from their scarred sides wealth of ore and splendour of marble; all things this people that King Valdemar ruled over could do; they levelled mountains, that over smooth roads the wains may might go, laden with silk and spices from the sea: they drained lakes, that the land might yield more and more as year by year the serfs, driven like cattle, but worse fed, worse housed, died slowly scarce knowing that they had souls; they builded them huge ships, and said that they were masters of the sea too; only I trow the sea was an unruly subject, and often sent them back their ships cut into more pieces than the pines of them were, when the adze first fell upon them; they raised towers, and bridges, and marble palaces with endless corridors rose-scented, and cooled with welling fountains.[141]

Morris's description of the corrupt invaders as 'masters of the sea' could be interpreted as anti-imperialist, an expression of antagonism towards Britain's expansionist colonial policy at that time. Furthermore, this passage is remarkable in

[138] *C.W.* Vol. XXIII, p.10.
[139] *C.W.* Vol. XXIII, p.22.
[140] *C.W*. Vol. I, p. 227.
[141] Ibid., p.226.

that it propounds Morris's theory on the causal relationship between the relentless pursuit of profit by the industrialists/capitalists of his era and the exploitation of both nature and the labour force. In his lecture 'The Lesser Arts' (1877), Morris argues that the quest for profit is ruining the English countryside:

> Is money to be gathered? Cut down the pleasant trees among the houses, pull down ancient and venerable buildings for the money that a few square yards of London dirt will fetch; blacken rivers, hide the sun and poison the air with smoke and worse, and it's nobody's business to see to it or mend it: that is all modern commerce, the counting-house forgetful of the workshop, will do for us herein.[142]

At this point, it is worth remembering that the *OCM* was published by Morris's Oxford Brotherhood for an almost exclusively male readership who shared his eclectic tastes. The circulation was small,[143] and the audience privileged. In fact, one definition of brotherhood (that adopted by the Christian Church) is, 'the community of feeling between all human beings'.[144] This implies inclusivity and equality. Another (antithetical) definition, however, is 'an association of people linked by a common interest etc.'[145] The latter implies that people who do not share the 'interest' in question are excluded from the clique. The *OCM* was read only by a relatively small and predominately male élite.[146] This did, of course, follow the tradition of many earlier authors and poets, John Donne, for example, whose poems were circulated in manuscript to his peers and never intended for a public readership. Morris's concerns about social equality may have influenced his early writings but they did not stimulate any practical action at that time. Even much later, after he became politically active as a socialist, Morris's aims in founding the

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[142] *C.W.* Vol. XXII, p.24.
[143] 750 copies of the first issue were printed and sold at a cost of one shilling each.
[144] Oxford English Dictionary (*OED).*
[145] *OED.*
[146] It should be noted that although the number of women who read the magazine cannot be determined there was only one female contributor. Miss Macdonald (later, Lady Burne-Jones) supplied three articles: two reviews and a story entitled *The Sacrifice.* H. Buxton Forman, *The Books of William Morris* (London: The Holland Press, 1976), pp. 28-33.

Kelmscott Press did not include making books available to all the social classes. In fact, Morris acknowledged that the books published by the Kelmscott Press were prohibitively expensive and therefore beyond the reach of most people:

> True, the prices are not the prices which Tom, Dick or Harry can pay. I wish – I wish indeed that the cost of the books was less, only that is impossible if the printing and decoration and the paper and the binding are to be what they should be.[147]

His contemporary Walter Crane, whilst acknowledging the superior quality of the Kelmscott Press publications and the Press's influence on other printers and publishers,[148] was one of the many to comment on the exclusivity of the Kelmscott editions. 'The Kelmscott books are by no means issued at "popular prices", are limited in number, and for the most part are hardly for the general reader, unless that ubiquitous person is more erudite and omnivorous than is commonly credited.'[149] Morris advocated the building of more public libraries where everyone would be able to read 'all the best books, printed in the best and most beautiful type.'[150] Ironically, it was the mass production of cheap, 'vitally ugly'[151] books by capitalist publishers that gave poorer people access to a wide range of literature, including Morris's own later romances and socialist writings. As Anna Vaninskaya observes, 'Morris's late fantasies were even published by houses like Longmans and Green [...]. It is through such trade publishers and not through his Kelmscott Press or the Socialist League Office in Farringdon Road that Morris's romances reached their widest audience.'[152] Nevertheless, these early writings, which Morris later described as 'very *young*

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[147] Peterson, p. 97.

[148] Essex House Press, for example, was founded in 1898 by C.R. Ashbee and was part of the Guild of Handicraft, an Arts and Crafts association dedicated to providing fulfilling work for its craftsmen and workers. Ashbee employed many workers from the Kelmscott Press after it closed down in 1898.

[149] Crane, p.159.

[150] Peterson, p.92.

[151] Lesley A. Baker, 'The Kelmscott Press: To What Purpose' *JWMS*, Vol. 12.2 (Spring 1997) pp 36-38.

[152] Anna Vaninskaya *William Morris and the Idea of Community: Romance, History and Propaganda, 1880-1914* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p.42.

indeed',[153] demonstrate a disregard for inherited social position and an enlightened view of the role of women in society. Moreover, his sympathetic and nostalgic (in the true sense of the word) descriptions of life and work in the Middle Ages, particularly with regard to the symbiotic relationship between craft and nature, reveal concerns for the environment and its despoliation by contemporary industrial practices. These were concerns that Morris would come to articulate throughout his life.

(IV) *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems*

Morris's next publication was a volume of thirty original poems under the title *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* (1858). This book was published, at Morris's own expense, by Bell and Daldy and was not generally well-received. By the time of the ***Defence's*** publication in February 1858, Morris was already associated in the reading public's mind with the Pre-Raphaelite Movement and his poetry was perceived in many quarters, like the Pre-Raphaelite paintings themselves, as being too radical. One anonymous critic, for instance, wrote scathingly in the *Spectator* in February 1858 that, '[...] the author has introduced into his poems touches of what modern research or judgment has shown to be its real coarseness and immorality. To our taste, the style is as bad as bad can be. Mr Morris imitates little save faults.'[154] Other reviewers were less disparaging but few, if any, gave the volume unqualified praise. In his review in the *Literary Gazette* in March 1858, Richard Garnett described Morris as 'an exquisite and original genius, a poet whom poets will love'[155] but, despite this commendation, Garnett also states in the same piece that:

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[153] *Letters,* Vol. II, p.229.
[154] Peter Faulkner, *William Morris: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p.30.
[155] *The Critical Heritage,* p.37.

> [Morris's] carelessness and inattention to finish is his fault, and a serious one. It has ruined the first two poems in his volume, which should have been the finest. A little trouble will, perhaps, make 'Queen Guenevere's Defence' what it ought to be, but 'King Arthur's Tomb' will never be fit for anything but the fire. [156]

Morris was deeply affected by this criticism and it was nine years before his next publication, *The Life and Death of Jason* (1867).

Morris had been a great admirer of the works of the Pre-Raphaelites since first reading about them in one of John Ruskin's Edinburgh lectures in 1854 and he had, in fact, purchased several of their paintings, including Rossetti's *The Blue Closet* and *The Tune of Seven Towers.* What attracted Morris to the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites was their appropriation of the naturalism of the Gothic art of the Middle Ages. Years later, in 1891, in a lecture entitled 'The English Pre-Raphaelites', Morris acknowledged the Movement's very great influence on him:

> It has become clear that the 'new' school which was received at one time with such volleys of scorn and has since made its way so vigorously, was really nothing more or less than a branch of the great Gothic Art which once pervaded all Europe.[157]

Whilst the Pre-Raphaelite painters could not be described as eco-socialists or, indeed, any kind of socialists, the naturalism and apparent egalitarianism of the Movement undoubtedly appealed to Morris as a young man whose love of nature and developing social conscience had engendered a passionate concern for the environment.

By the time he met the charismatic Pre-Raphaelite painter and poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti in 1856, Morris had already abandoned the Church in order to dedicate his life to art (architecture more specifically). Rossetti encouraged Morris to

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[156] *The Critical Heritage,* p.36.
[157] May Morris, Vol. 1, p. 302.

paint and involved him and others in the creation of the Oxford Union murals.[158] The poems of the *Defence*, largely a product of that period, all are mediæval in setting but reveal other influences as well. The first group, usually referred to as Arthurian, is inspired by the idealized chivalric romance of Malory. The second group, the more realistic Froissartian, is derived from Lord Berners' translation of Froissart's *Chronicles*. The third group, often referred to as atmospheric, have an almost fairy tale dream-like quality, for example, 'Rapunzel' and 'Golden Wings'. From the following close reading of some of the poems published in the *Defence* it is possible to discern Morris's early eco-social philosophy. The latter is, however, less pronounced than in the *OCM* tales. This supports the argument that the development of Morris's nascent eco-social thought was delayed by his involvement with the Pre-Raphaelites, particularly Dante Gabriel Rossetti.[159]

(i) Social equality and the sense of community

At first sight, it is difficult to see concerns about class inequality in the poem. Following the convention found in, say, Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*, the only characters named are Kings, Queens, Knights and their Ladies. Those lower down the social scale are referred to generically by their occupation: herdsman, churl, carle, maid etc. The poems are, however, imbued with the heroic ideal and the idea of brotherhood, though Peter Faulkner has noted that Morris's Froissartian poems 'recreate successfully an atmosphere of violence in which chivalry is a high ideal

[158] In 1857, Rossetti accepted a commission to paint murals in the new Oxford Union depicting scenes from the legend of King Arthur. He enlisted the help of others, including Morris, but the only experienced artist was Arthur Hughes. The project was never fully completed and within a few months the murals had deteriorated badly due to the ill-preparation of the materials.

[159] There is no doubt that Morris greatly admired the charismatic Rossetti. Mackail writes that during the first months of their acquaintance Rossetti's influence over Morris 'grew stronger and stronger. [Rossetti's] doctrine that everybody should be a painter, enforced with all the weight of his immense personality and an eloquence and plausibility in talk which all who knew him in those years describe as unparalled in their experience, carried Morris for a time off his feet.' *Mackail,* Vol. 1, p.108.

only occasionally achieved.'[160] In the poem 'The Haystack in the Floods' there is certainly nothing chivalric in the behaviour of Godmar (whose character is based on Godmar du Fay, a French baron who fought against Edward III at the Battle of Blanchtaque[161]) to his opponent and to the damsel, Jehanne. It could be argued that in his realistic Froissartian poems, Morris is, as Kirchhoff states, 'using history to refute idealized heroic narrative.'[162] This is a reasonable view but, conversely, it could be argued that Morris's evocation of the chivalric ideal has more significance when juxtaposed with the unheroic behaviour of the villains. Furthermore, the milieu of these poems serves to accentuate the superiority of the hero who behaves honourably even when faced with a violent death.

As has already been noted, Morris was greatly influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites, particularly the charismatic Rossetti, to whom Morris dedicated *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems.* In this volume, as in his contributions to the *OCM,* Morris's earlier influences, mediaeval history and romance, northern mythology as well as his obsession with love, death and fate are present. The book is imbued throughout with the spirit of mediaeval romance as well as the sometime grim reality of the Middle Ages. As Aymer Valance noted in 1897, shortly after Morris's death, 'the whole book from end to end was alive with the antique spirit of the days of chivalry'.[163] It is, arguably, Morris's greatest evocation of the essence of chivalric romance, and his references to colour and heraldic devices such as pennons, shields and armorial coverings on clothing makes this volume of poetry

[160] Peter Faulkner, *Against the Age: An Introduction to William Morris* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980), p.16.
[161] Silver, p.33.
[162] Kirchhoff, p. 102.
[163] Aymer Valance, *The Life and Work of William Morris* (London: Studio Editions, 1986), p.28.

Morris's most Pre-Raphaelite as many of the Movement's painters, Rossetti and Ford Madox Brown, for example, incorporated mediaeval insignia in their works.[164]

Heraldry was, as Elizabeth Helsinger has stated, 'a fully established code with an important role in social life and hence a place in the literary and visual representation by the thirteenth century, and it remained important […] through the sixteenth century'[165] and manuscripts from that period were often adorned with heraldic devices. It is unsurprising then that Morris should employ these devices to evoke what he believed to be an earlier Golden Age. The rise of neo-mediaevalism in the nineteenth century generated, amongst other things, a great interest in heraldic devices and many of the *nouveau riche* (including Morris's own father in 1843), applied for coats of arms from the Heraldic College in an attempt to consolidate as well as validate their rise in social status. The increase in both the size and prosperity of the middle classes in the first half of the nineteenth century was attributable, in the main, to industrialisation and the corresponding rise in trade during the period. It is perhaps somewhat ironic that Morris should employ chivalric customs and heraldic devices in his poetry, given that they had, in a sense, been appropriated by *parvenus* as symbols of social status (and, thus, class inequality) and badges of success in commerce. Morris's fascination with the Middle Ages was, however, much more profound than, as William Bell Scott observes, the 'sentimental-nineteenth-century-revival-mediaevalism'.[166] It was based on a deep understanding and scholarly knowledge of the history, customs and literature of the

[164] According to Dinah Roe, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood 'were especially interested in how text and image worked together to create meaning. Members of the Brotherhood were in the habit of writing poems to accompany their paintings and producing paintings to illustrate each other's poems.' *The Pre-Raphaelites: From Rossetti to Ruskin.* Ed. Dinah Roe (London: Penguin Group, 2010), p. xxiv.

[165] Elizabeth Helsinger, *Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts: Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), p.78.

[166] Vallance, p.27.

period that few Victorians possessed as well as his love of nature. In her book *A Pagan Prophet: William Morris* (1978), Charlotte H. Oberg states that:

> It is actually rather ironic that the cliché about Morris that is given the widest circulation is that he was at once an interpreter and champion of the Middle Ages, for, though he was indisputably an authority on many aspects of that period, his turn of mind was never medieval, but something at once older and more modern: he was a pagan and a Rousseauvian romantic, a lover of the earth and mankind, whose innate goodness was the infallible sign of his birthright – of his kinship, his identity, with the natural world.[167]

Oberg's contention that his 'turn of mind' was 'at once older and more modern' accurately describes Morris's philosophy. He admired many aspects of life in the Middle Ages, particularly the cohesive social groupings where everyone worked for the benefit of the community as a whole. It is of course reasonable to presume that during that period not everyone was entirely selfless and, certainly, violence and exploitation did occur. Morris was, later in his socialist writings, to advocate what was best of mediaeval life as a blueprint for a better future society. Likewise, in his early poetry Morris emphasises those aspects of life in the Middle Ages which he believed were superior to the Victorian era as a method of critiquing contemporary society.

(ii) The portrayal of women

In the title poem, Queen Guenevere defiantly defends herself against the charge of adultery. Throughout this dramatic monologue, the queen uses her social status, beauty and sexuality to threaten, flatter and cajole her accusers:

[167] Charlotte H. Oberg, *A Pagan Prophet: William Morris* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1978), p.158.

Being such a lady could I weep these tears
If this were true? *A great queen such as I* [...]
(ll. 25-27)[168]

With all this wickedness; say no rash word
Against me, *being so beautiful;* my eyes,
Wept all away to grey, may bring some sword

To drown you in your blood; *see my breast rise,*
Like waves of purple sea, as here I stand;
And how my arms are moved in wonderful wise,

Yea also at my full heart's strong command,
See my long throat how the words go up
In ripples to my mouth [...]
(ll. 13-21)[169]
(italics mine)

She justifies her sin without actually admitting to it and prevaricates long enough to be rescued by her lover, Sir Launcelot. Morris nevertheless displays an undoubted empathy with Guenevere. She has committed adultery, of that there is little doubt, but the poet avoids moral judgement and the reader is left potentially admiring her courageous and clever defence which she sets out on her own terms and in her own words. Nevertheless, there is the sense of Guenevere as an Eve figure who, like the Devil (known as the father of lies), uses sophistry as a means of seduction.

Morris's Queen is not the embodiment of the ideal Pre-Raphaelite female like the beautiful, languorous and distant subject of another poem in the volume, 'Praise of My Lady':

Beneath her brows the lids fall slow,
The lashes a clear shadow throw
Where I should wish my lips to be.
Beata mea Domina!
(ll. 21-24)[170]

In contrast, Guenevere is seductive, spirited, intelligent and passionate:

[168] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.5.
[169] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.8.
[170] Ibid., p.141.

> Though still she stood right up, and never shrank,
> But spoke on bravely, glorious lady fair!
> Whatever tears full lips may have drunk,
>
> She stood, and seemed to think, and wrung her hair,
> Spoke out at last with no more trace of shame,
> With passionate twisting of her body there:
> (ll. 25-30)[171]

The Queen is not absolved of her sin, but her guilt is mitigated by the fact that she was trapped in a loveless marriage. Guenevere's father Lodegrance and Arthur had arranged the match without consulting Guenevere. The practice of a father choosing a daughter's spouse had, certainly, been somewhat eroded by the Victorian period. Nevertheless, in such a patriarchal society a woman's role was secondary to that of a man, and women were often coerced into marriage by economic or social imperatives. Morris's empathy with Guenevere's unhappy marital situation prefigures his own views on gender equality and marriage which he would explicitly articulate in the future. Some years later he argued, for example, that, for women, marriage was often no better than 'prostitution or a kind of legalised rape'.[172] In 1858, however, Morris was engaged to the Pre-Raphaelite muse Jane Burden and was, therefore, unlikely to be thinking sceptically about marriage. Nonetheless, circumstances would support the theory that, at that time, Morris believed marriage should be a union between individuals based on mutual love and affection, not a legal agreement into which one party, usually the woman, was coerced by filial duty or financial imperatives.

A definitive assessment of Morris's views on the position of women in society is, of course, difficult to achieve by the examination of only a single poem. Although Morris does appear to empathise with Guenevere in the title piece, he by no means

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[171] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.2.
[172] *Letters,* Vol. II, p.404.

condones her adultery. This is evident in the companion piece to 'The Defence of Guenevere', 'King Arthur's Tomb'. The latter poem describes the final meeting of Guenevere and Launcelot at King Arthur's grave. The text is erotic as well as penitential in tone, as the lovers are overcome with guilt. Early on, Launcelot remembers happy, intimate moments with Guenevere:

> She would let me lie
> And kiss her feet, or, if I sat behind,
> Would drop her hand and arm most tenderly,
> And touch my mouth. And she would let me wind
>
> Her hair around my neck so that it fell
> Upon my red robe, strange in the twilight
> With many unnamed colours, till the bell
> Of her mouth on my cheek sent a delight
>
> Through all my ways of being;
> (ll. 9-17)[173]

Guenevere, however, weighed down by 'lumps of sin',[174] has been living in a nunnery and, although still beautiful, 'the glow had left her face and hands'.[175] The erstwhile queen is remorseful but she still cannot 'keep from loving Launcelot'. This is seen in her lament:

> Why did your long lips cleave
> In such strange way unto my fingers then?
> So eagerly glad to kiss, so loath to leave
> When you rose up? Why among helmed men
>
> Could I always tell you by your long strong arms,
> And sway like an angel's in your saddle there?
> Why sicken'd I so often with alarms
> Over the tilt-yard? Why were you more fair
> Than aspens in the autumn at their best?
> (ll. 25-33)[176]

It is interesting that although Guenevere acknowledges her sin, she attempts to assuage her guilt by blaming Launcelot for her fall:

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[173] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.12.
[174] Ibid., p.15
[175] Ibid., p.15
[176] Ibid., p.18.

> Across my husband's head, fair Launcelot!
> Fair serpent marked with V upon the head!
> This thing we did while yet he was alive,
> Why not, O twisting knight, now he is dead?
> (ll. 17-20)[177]

The above lines are reminiscent of Eve's temptation in the Garden of Eden.[178] By calling Launcelot a 'serpent' and a 'twisting knight', she clearly accuses her lover of being the cause of her sin. Furthermore, it is she who ensures that Launcelot appreciates the true gravity of their betrayal of Arthur:

> Banner and sword and shield, you dare not pray to die,
> Lest you meet Arthur in the other world,
> And knowing who you are, he pass you by,
> (ll. 29-31)[179]

Morris's portrayal of Guenevere as an assertive, though flawed, character arguably subverts Victorian stereotypes of the woman as 'Seductress' in 'The Defence of Guenevere' and as 'Fallen Woman' in 'King Arthur's Tomb'. In a remarkable reversal of gender roles, it is Guenevere who has the moral courage to insist that the lovers never meet again (even though she is a now a widow and therefore legally free) and Launcelot who passively swoons.[180] Despite Morris's obvious empathy with Guenevere, however, her fate is that of any woman who threatens male authority in a patriarchal society: banishment. In her essay on 'The Woman Question' in Morris's later romances, Lori Campbell observes that:

> As in Morris's time, these medieval women who challenged male authority often found themselves bound by social constraint, identified as "witches" living on society's fringes, or judged and left with no choice but the nunnery as in Guenevere's case.[181]

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[177] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.17.
[178] This is the image created in Rossetti's painting *Arthur's Tomb* (1854). (Figure 7).
[179] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.22.
[180] A male lover swooning is not, however, unusual in mediaeval romance. Consider Tristan and Chaucer's Troilus, for example.
[181] Lori Campbell, "When Medieval Romance Meets Victorian Reality: The 'Woman Question' in William Morris's *The Wood Beyond the World"*. *Beyond Arthurian Romances: The Reach of Victorian Medievalism* eds. J. Palgren & L.M. Holloway (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), p.175.

One could argue that Morris's choice of Arthurian romance as a subject for his verse underscored rather than challenged the contemporary view of women. Portrayals of knighthood and chivalric paternalism, as Boos argues, 'tended rather obviously to ratify and encourage a patriarchal model of the ideal Victorian family [*and woman*].'[182] This is a credible hypothesis as, within the conventions of mediaeval romance, gender roles are strictly defined and are inflexible. Morris's sympathetic portrayal of Guenevere, as a realistic as opposed to an ideal character, ultimately challenges rather than endorses the patriarchal *status quo*. Guenevere, like many Victorian women, was trapped in a loveless marriage to a man chosen by her father. Any attempt at defying convention, by taking a lover, for example, or even seeking a divorce, was met with severe consequences.

Morris's undoubted concern for the plight of women in society can also be seen in other poems in this volume for example, 'The Haystack in the Floods', a work Froissartian in its realism. Here, mediaeval life is full of dirt, rain and mud. It is a 'world of grimmest reality'[183] sharply contrasted to the romance settings of Morris's Arthurian poems. In the 'Haystack', Jehanne, the heroine, is forced by the treacherous knight Godmar either to yield to his sexual advances or see her lover Robert murdered . She chooses not to submit and then witnesses her lover's death, which is very graphically described:

> She saw him bend
> Back Robert's head; she saw him send
> The thin steel down; the blade told well,
> Right backward the knight Robert fell,
> And moaned as dogs do, being half dead,
> Unwitting as I deem: so then
> Godmar turn'd grinning to his men,
> Who ran some five or six, and beat

[182] Florence Boos, *History and Community: Essays in Victorian Medievalism* (New York: Garland, 1992), p. 9.
[183] Silver, p.33.

His head to pieces at their feet. (ll. 15-23)[184]

The fate of Robert and Jehanne is cruel, but they have behaved honourably and for Robert, certainly, there is glory in death. As Kenneth Hodges states, 'heroic men agree to risk or suffer bodily injury, thereby showing their commitment and bravery.'[185] Robert's chivalrous behaviour is juxtaposed with that of the ignoble Godmar, who risks nothing himself and grins sadistically as his men viciously beat Robert to death. Jehanne's behaviour , however, is also brave and honourable. She could have passively submitted to Godmar's sexual advances and thus saved her own life and that of her lover. Jehanne chooses instead to risk everything rather than voluntarily submit to an enemy. Ingrid Hanson, in her book *William Morris and the Uses of Violence 1856-1890* (2013), states that, 'in making this choice , and in the threat of future violence in the cause of her own freedom or revenge she [Jehanne] affirms , however faintly, her right to act in knightly self-defence, and refuses the traditional female role of passive victim.' [186]Jehanne's fate is, however, unresolved and the reader is left wondering whether she will give in, albeit reluctantly, to Godmar's sexual advances or kill herself or her oppressor, as she had earlier threatened:

"You know that I could strangle you
While you were sleeping; or bite through
Your throat, by God's help – Ah!" she said,
"Lord Jesus, pity your poor maid!
For in such wise they hem me in,
I cannot choose but sin and sin,
Whatever happens: yet I think
They could not make me eat or drink,
And so should I just reach my rest."
(ll. 29-37)[187]

[184] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.128.
[185] Kenneth Hodges, 'Wounded Masculinity: Injury and Gender in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Mort D'Arthur'. Studies in Philology* No. 106 (2009), pp. 14-31.
[186] Ingrid Hanson, *William Morris and the Uses of Violence 1856-1890.* (London: Anthem Press, 2013), p.51.
[187] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.126.

In the above lines, Jehanne reveals her difficult situation. She has no choice but to commit some type of sin: fornication, murder or suicide In the patriarchal society of the Middle Ages and, indeed, Victorian Britain, women had little autonomy.

(iii) The importance of nature and the environment

Walter Pater (1839-1894), the leading advocate of the Aesthetic Movement, observed in his review of *The Earthly Paradise* in 1868 that:

> Of the things of nature the mediæval mind had a deep sense; but its sense of them was not objective, no real escape to the world without one. The aspects and motions of nature only reinforced its prevailing mood, and were in conspiracy with one's own brain against one. A single sentiment invaded the world; everything was infused with a motive drawn from the soul.[188]

In Morris's poetry, in other words, the landscape often reflects the mood of his protagonists. Morris's employment of pathetic fallacy also reveals his view of the inequitable society of the time. In 'The Haystack in the Floods', the nobility use their power to oppress the weak. Additionally, the tragic events of the 'Haystack' take place in a colourless barren land of 'leafless'[189] trees, a land which is not nourished by life-giving rain but, rather, is destroyed by tempestuous floods. The interrelationship between the destruction or exploitation of the environment and the domination of women by men in this poem is consistent with the ecofeminist argument that in a patriarchal society there is a connection between, as Karen Warren has argued, 'the domination [of] those humans in subdominant or subordinate positions, particularly women, and the domination of nonhuman nature.'[190]

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[188] *The Critical Heritage*, p.83.
[189] *C.W.* Vol I. p.124
[190] Karen J.Warren, *Ecological Feminism* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.1.

Morris's descriptions of landscape illustrate the contrast between the idea of courtly love as found in mediaeval romance and the reality of the Middle Ages. His frequent references to the elements, for example, show that he understood the importance of the symbiotic relationship between humans and the natural world. On this subject Laura Lambdin has stated that:

> As the people of the Middle Ages were, of necessity, so greatly concerned with the more rigorous or environmental aspects of life, Morris's poems show a fidelity to the medieval period (for example, in their frequent mentions of weather conditions), while they simultaneously reflect important aspects of Romanticism.[191]

Another of the Froissartian poems, 'Concerning Geffray Teste Noire', illustrates the grim realities of the Middle Ages. This dramatic monologue is narrated by an old soldier, John of Newcastle, who recounts his involvement in the English force's attempt to capture Sir Geffray, the notoriously cruel 'Gascon thief'.[192] The setting for the poem is Verville wood which, as the name ('green town') implies, is clearly an idyllic place:

> Through it [*the wood*] the highway runs.
> 'Twixt copses of green hazel, very thick,
> And underneath, with glimmering of suns,
> The primroses are happy; the dews lick
> The soft green moss.
> (ll.5-9)[193]

The utopian elements of this setting are challenged by the narrator's admission that this is a place where Geffray is to be ambushed. Instead of meeting their enemy nobly on the battlefield, the soldiers, having obtained information from spies, hide at sundown in the woods covering their arms with cloths 'lest they should glitter'[194] and alert Geffray to their presence. Furthermore, there is a sense that, although the aim

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[191] Laura C. & Robert T. Lambdin, *Camelot in the Nineteenth Century: Arthurian Characters in the Poems of Tennyson, Arnold, Morris and Swinburne.* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2000), p.73. web.a.ebscothost.com accessed 01/03/2015.
[192] *C.W*. Vol. 1, p.75.
[193] Ibid., p.77.
[194] Ibid., p.77.

is to apprehend or kill the malefactor, Geffray, they are, perhaps, just as interested in capturing his 'carriages of booty'.[195]

(iv) The folly of materialism

'The Defence of Guenevere' could be read as a paradigm for the capitalist ethos of Morris's era. Despite his 'great name' King Arthur, has allowed his court to be run by 'knaves' such as Sir Mellyagraunce (factory owners). Arthur's knights are defied, cajoled, bewitched and ultimately destroyed by the sensuous Guenevere (profits or material wealth). As we have seen, Morris never admitted to writing allegorical or didactic texts, however, it could be argued that he was subconsciously expressing his anxiety about the greed of many contemporary capitalists.

In 'Geffray', John, the narrator, discovers the skeletons of a man and a woman. From remnants of their clothing, he believes them to be a knight and his lady. The couple have obviously been brutally slain and John muses on their history. He remembers when, as little more than a boy, he took part in the massacre of women in Beauvais and compares that to the chivalrous behaviour of the deceased knight:

> Her loving knight, mounted and arm'd to win
> Great honour for her, fighting in the lists.
> (ll. 23-24)[196]

Despite being 'sick of such a life'[197]of cruelty and violence, however, John remains a soldier. This proves a lucrative career as he eventually retires to a castle. John does, however, ensure that the lovers are united in death by burying their bodies together in an idyllic setting:

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[195] *C.W.* Vol. 1, p. 77.
[196] Ibid., p. 79.
[197] *C.W.* Vol. 1, p. 78.

In green nook pure
There did I lay them, every wearies bone;
And over it they lay, with stone-white hands
Clasped fast together, hair made bright with gold;
(ll. 7-10)[198]

(V) Conclusion

In 'Geffray', the anonymous knight and his lady, like Margaret and Amyot in the 'Unknown Church' and Suir and Cissella in 'Svend and his Brethren', never consummate their relationship. The failure of erotic love is a recurring theme in Morris's early poetry and prose, as rarely are his lovers physically united in life.[199] There are exceptions, however, in some of the poems of the *Defence* volume which might suggest, as with his earlier contributions to the *OCM,* that Morris could not comfortably write about the consummation of heterosexual love. These poems are, however, distinctly non-naturalistic and, as Silver has stated, 'only within the fairy tale world of pure imagination is success in love seen as possible.'[200] Certainly love seems to triumph in some of the poems. In 'Two Red Roses Across the Moon' and 'The Gilliflower of Gold', for example, a knight wins his lady following success in a tournament or in battle. Themes of love, death and fate are, however, present in many of Morris's other 'atmospheric' poems. In 'The Blue Closet', a poem inspired by Rossetti's painting of the same name, a knight comes back from the grave to reclaim his lover, Lady Louise:

Through the floor shot up a lily red,
With a patch of earth from the land of the dead,
For he was strong in the land of the dead.
(ll. 7-9)[201]

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[198] Ibid., p. 81.
[199] According to Dinah Roe, a cultivated melancholy was a noteable feature of Pre-Raphaelite writing which 'contemporary critics pointed to as a sign of Pre-Raphaelitism's unhealthy and "morbid" tendencies, particularly in the love poetry'. Roe, p. xxii.
[200] Silver, p.40.
[201] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.113.

Morris's earliest poetry and prose do contain expressions of what could be termed eco-social beliefs, although it is reasonable to conclude that such concerns are expressed more overtly in Morris's earlier works published in the *OCM* than in *The Defence* volume which Morris compiled, for the most part, *after* he met Rossetti. There are no references in the *Defence* to the satisfaction gained from useful work, for example. The extent to which Morris's early eco-social views could be said to be Pre-Raphaelite in origin is highly debatable, as his nascent socialist and environmental concerns acquired in childhood were developed at Oxford and influenced by the ideas of Carlyle, Kingsley and Ruskin. Furthermore, the Pre-Raphaelite movement was noted for its truth to nature and was inclusivist in the sense that no object was perceived as being too humble to paint. Nevertheless, Rossetti and other Pre-Raphaelites did not articulate any social or environmental concerns. The Movement was in that sense apolitical. The Pre-Raphaelites rebelled, certainly, but against the art establishment, not the social or political *status quo.* In fact, Morris was the only Pre-Raphaelite or member of his Oxford Set, apart from Charles Faulkner, who became politically active. Indeed, many of Morris's liberally–minded friends, William de Morgan, Cormell Price and Burne-Jones, for example, viewed his socialism with dismay. Burne-Jones, in particular, felt that the socialists exploited Morris. He was later to say that:

> When he went into it I thought he would have subdued the ignorant, conceited, mistaken rancour of it all – that he would teach them some humility and give them some sense of obedience, with his splendid bird's eye-view of all that has happened in the world and his genius for History in the abstract. I had hopes he would affect them. But never a bit of it – he did them absolutely no good – they got complete possession of him.

> All the nice men that went into it were never listened to, only noisy, rancorous ones got the ear of the movement.[202]

Furthermore, Pre-Raphaelitism was an almost exclusively male movement[203] and could not be described as in any way proto-feminist. As Roe argues, 'in an era which saw an unprecedented number of women entering the literary marketplace, Pre-Raphaelitism maintained strict demarcations between women's roles (as muses) and men's (as creators).'[204] It was his close involvement in the world of the Pre-Raphaelite painters, in particular Rossetti who, according to Morris, 'took no interest in politics'[205], that diverted Morris from more *overt* expressions of his eco-social beliefs. As Morris himself later said about that period in his life, 'socio-political ideas [...] would have developed probably but for the attractions of art and poetry.'[206]

It could be argued then, that although Morris's early poetry and prose is a product of *his* Pre-Raphaelite period, the eco-socialism expressed therein is only tangentially related to the wider Movement itself.

[202] MacCarthy, p. 481.
[203] The obvious exception is Rossetti's sister Christina, although even she was not fully 'in'.
[204] Roe, p. xxxiii.
[205] MacKail, Vol. II, p.99.
[206] *Letters,* Vol. II, p.228.

Chapter Two
The Life and Death of Jason and *Scenes from the Fall of Troy* (1859-1867)

(I) Introduction

In February 1858, the same month that *The Defence of Guenevere & Other Poems* was published, Morris became engaged to the Pre-Raphaelite muse, Jane (Janey) Burden. Jane,[1] aged just eighteen, had been 'discovered' by Rossetti at a theatre in Oxford in October 1857 and he persuaded her to pose for him as Guenevere. It is unclear exactly when Morris first met Jane, but, as he was sharing lodgings with Rossetti at that time,[2] it is reasonable to assume that it was in the autumn of 1857. From a poor but respectable family (her father was a stableman), Jane was not considered by some to be the ideal match for Morris, despite her striking appearance. According to Algernon Swinburne, Jane was a 'wonderful and most perfect stunner'[3] but 'the idea of marrying her is insane. To kiss her feet is the utmost men should dream of doing.'[4] It has also been argued that she had 'a commonplace mind',[5] but this is an overly harsh assessment. Certainly, she would only have had a very rudimentary childhood education, probably at Holywell Parish School in Oxford, yet Jane was by her middle years known to be widely read in French and Italian literature. According to Jan Marsh, Jane 'was rarely at an intellectual disadvantage in

[1] See Appendix III Figure 8.
[2] Rossetti, Morris and Burne-Jones had taken lodgings in Oxford in July 1857 to begin work on the Oxford Union murals.
[3] Roderick Marshall, *William Morris and his Earthly Paradises* (Tisbury: Compton Press, 1979), p.43.
[4] C.Y. Lang, *The Swinburne Letters* Vol 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p.18.
[5] Mayra Zaturenska, *Mayra Zaturenska's Depression Diary, 1933-36* ed. Mary Beth Hinton (Syracuse: Syracuse University Library Associates Courier 31, 1996), pp. 125-51 [Quoted in David Latham, *Writing on the Image: Reading William Morris* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 223.]

the Pre-Raphaelite circle and it must be assumed that she took all the opportunities offered to remedy her educational deficiencies.'[6]

Much has been written about William Morris's marriage, some of it discretely circumspect in the Victorian tradition of J.W. Mackail, his authorised biographer, for example. More modern biographers and critics, however, have tried to unravel the mystery of the breakdown of the marriage of this intensely private man. His own daughter May wrote of her father that 'No glimpse of the inner life of Morris was ever vouchsafed even to his closest friends – *secretum meum mihi.'*[7] In addition, MacCarthy notes that 'the true condition of [Morris's] marriage was always glossed over by his friends'[8] but, from the letters and contemporary descriptions of the behaviour of the couple, the marriage became deeply troubled shortly after the birth of their second child in 1862. This was even before Jane began her affair with Rossetti.

Morris had, arguably, fallen in love with an ideal or type, rather than a woman. Jane was beautiful but lacked the spirited intelligence and passion of the heroine of Morris's poem, 'The Defence of Guenevere'. On the contrary, Jane was the embodiment of the perfect Pre-Raphaelite female: beautiful, languorous and distant like the subject of Morris's poem 'Praise of My Lady':

> Her great eyes, standing far apart,
> Draw up some memory from her heart,
> And gaze out mournfully;
> *Beata mea Domina!*
> So beautiful and kind they are,
> But most times looking out afar,
> Waiting for something, not for me.
> *Beata mea Domina!*
> (ll. 25-32)[9]

[6] Jan Marsh, *Jane and May Morris: A Biographical Story 1839-1938* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1968), p.31.
[7] May Morris, Vol. 1, p. 441.
[8] MacCarthy, p.188.
[9] *C.W.* Vol. I, p.141.

In these lines Morris seems to anticipate his marital troubles. If Morris had fallen in love with a Pre-Raphaelite icon, Jane, for her part, as she later admitted to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, never loved Morris at all.[10] It is conceivable that, at the time of their first meeting, Jane was attracted to the charismatic Rossetti who had plucked her from working class obscurity and flattered her by praising her unusual appearance. There is, however, no evidence that, even if this were the case, her feelings were reciprocated as Rossetti was by then engaged to Lizzie Siddall. By accepting Morris's proposal, Jane was assured of a very comfortable life in what was to her an exciting new world of art and culture. She was, furthermore, performing her filial duty: marriage to a wealthy man effectively provided financial security for her parents and siblings. For Jane it was an exceptionally good match, better than anything she could realistically have aspired to. It was an offer she simply could not refuse. Indeed, towards the end of her life Jane acknowledged the wisdom of her decision. 'After all,' she said, 'I suppose if I were young again I should do the same again.'[11] By contrast, Morris's proposal to Jane, a woman so far below him in social status, could be regarded as 'romantic and quixotic'[12] rather than prudent. It could also be viewed as early evidence of Morris's sense of fairness and decency. Many middle class Victorian men would have persuaded a woman in Jane's position to become their mistress: few would have offered her the respectability and security of marriage.

The period of their engagement and the early years of their marriage were happy ones for Morris. Shortly after their betrothal Morris travelled to France with Charles Faulkner and Philip Webb, and it was there that Webb and Morris discussed

[10] Peter Faulkner, *Wilfrid Scawen Blunt and the Morrises.* (London: William Morris Society Lecture, 1981).
[11] Ibid.
[12] Marsh, p.26.

the building of the house which was to be Morris's marital home. Red House,[13] as it came to be known, was designed by Philip Webb in collaboration with Morris. It was to be situated near Upton in Kent, a site chosen for the beauty of the surrounding countryside as well as its 'historic associations'.[14] Nearby were the mediaeval ruins of Lesnes Abbey and Hall Place, the Tudor mansion in Bexley which Morris greatly admired. The spot was also close to Watling Street, the old Roman road between London and Dover which was, of course, Chaucer's pilgrims route to Canterbury. This was an undoubted attraction for Morris, who was a great admirer of the poet. Although the architecture of the house was contemporary it was, as Morris was later to say, 'medieval in spirit'[15] with its large communal hall and enclosed garden. Inspired by the ideals of the Oxford Brotherhood, rather than the utopian beliefs of Sir Thomas More or the communal experiments of Robert Owen or Coleridge and Southey, Morris, at the Red House, constructed a quasi-mediaeval patriarchy rather than an egalitarian community. Established social hierarchies were maintained: for example, the servants' quarters, although far superior to those of most Victorian households, were located at the back of the house, accessed by a staircase leading directly to the kitchen. The house had separate modern conveniences for women and men, but the lavatory for the servants was outside in the yard.

Morris also took great pains in designing the garden although, according to Jan Marsh, there is no account of him ever doing any weeding or digging of it himself.[16] In relation to this, Morris was later to describe his ideal garden. It was clearly mediaeval rather than Victorian in design:

> Large or small, it should look both orderly and rich. It should be well fenced from the outside world. It should by no means imitate either the

[13] Figure 9.
[14] MacCarthy, p.154.
[15] *Letters,*Vol. II, p.228.
[16] Jan Marsh, *William Morris & Red House* (London: National Trust Books, 2005), p. 63.

> wilfulness or the wildness of nature, but should look like a thing never to be seen except near a house. In fact, it should look like part of the house. It follows from this that no private pleasure-garden should be very big, and a public garden should be divided and made to look like so many flower-closes in a meadow, or a wood, or amidst the pavement.[17]

Morris did, however, concentrate his energies on the interior of the house and because he could find nothing available on the market that he could bear to live with, he involved many of his friends in the decoration of Red House. Morris and his artistic circle worked together designing and creating furniture which was inspired by the art and literature of the Middle Ages. Burne-Jones, for example, painted scenes from the romance of *Sire Degrevaunt,* incorporating the faces of Morris and Jane on the walls and settles: chairs and wardrobes were decorated with scenes from Malory, Dante and Chaucer.[18] It was a period during which a group of young people realised their artistic potential through communal work. The success of this collaboration led to the establishment in April 1861 of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co.,[19] 'Fine Art Workmen in Painting, Carving Furniture and the Metals'.[20] In a letter to his former tutor, Frederick B. Guy, Morris summarised the reasons for the formation of the Firm:

> […] you will see that I have started as a decorator which I have long meant to do when I could get men of reputation to join me, and to this end mainly I have built my fine house. You see we are, or consider ourselves to be, the only real artistic firm of the kind, the others being only glass painters in point of fact, (like Clayton & Bell) or else a curious nondescript mixture of clerical tailor and decorator that flourishes in Southampton Street, Strand; whereas we shall do – most things.[21]

At Red House, friends were frequent visitors and Morris planned an extension so that Burne-Jones and his wife, Georgiana, could live there permanently. Red

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[17] William Morris, 'Making the Best of It' *C.W.* Vol. XXII, p.91.
[18] Figure 10.
[19] The original members of 'The Firm', as it was known, were Ford Maddox Brown, Edward Burne-Jones, C.J. Faulkner, Arthur Hughes, P.P. Marshall, D.G. Rossetti, Philip Webb and William Morris.
[20] *Letters,* Vol. I, p.37.
[21] Ibid., p.36.

House, with its large fence which separated Morris's extended *ménage* from the rest of the world, was an idyllic spot. Burne-Jones later captured this romanticised bucolic place in his painting, *Green Summer* (1864).[22] For a relatively short period, Morris lived an ideal life in his own *Joyous Guard* sustained, as Kirchhoff puts it,' by a set of fraternal relationships and commitment to a life of sensuous, quasi-medieval beauty, including the sensuous, quasi-medieval beauty of the woman he had married'. [23]

During his residence at Red House Morris did not publish any poetry or prose although two poems, *The Life and Death of Jason (1867)* and *Scenes From The Fall of Troy* (incomplete and unpublished), were written prior to his return to London in 1865. Throughout that period Morris was living in what was essentially an artistic community comprising an élite group of friends. It was an ideal existence, remote from the noise and pollution of the over-crowded city. Morris's physical absence from London did not mean, however, that he was unaware and, indeed, unconcerned about the realities of life in the industrial areas of England, particularly for the poor working class. As has been previously stated, Morris delivered his first political lecture in 1877 and officially 'became' a socialist in 1883 when he joined the Democratic Federation. This was some years after he quit Red House in 1865. An eco-social reading of both *Scenes* and *Jason* will, however, establish that, despite his privileged existence, Morris was still thinking about contemporary social and environmental problems caused by industrialisation and its concomitant capitalism at this early stage of his life.

[22] Figure 11.
[23] Kirchhoff, p.113.

(II) *Scenes From The Fall Of Troy*

(i) Introduction and Sources

This cycle of Homeric poems which Morris began in 1858 was never completed nor was it published during his lifetime. The obvious question is whether any work unpublished and, apparently, abandoned by an artist should be considered as part of their collected writings. May Morris acknowledged this dilemma when compiling the *Collected Works* of her father after his death: 'Some there are who think that nothing should go before the public that was not sanctioned by the writer, others that everything he left must be either published now – or burnt.'[24] In reference to this, May explained her own position:

> […] all my father's pieces of an early date that have any quality of beauty or that in any way throw light upon his character and ideas have been considered. The unpublished poems and fragments not here [*Collected Works* Vol. XXIV] included have been described and quoted from, and there remains nothing more that we should wish to be given to the world.[25]

It can be inferred from the above quotation that May withheld from publication very few of Morris's previously unpublished or incomplete works. The majority of critics would not argue with May's criteria for publication as *any* poem, letter or other writing must surely give some insight into the thoughts and feelings of a writer at a given point in time.

There is also a second question to consider here, and that is why this particular cycle of poems, *Scenes from the Fall of Troy,* was abandoned in 1859 and never completed. Several reasons are plausible, the first and most obvious being

[24] *C.W.* Vol. XXIV, p. xxvij.
[25] Ibid., p. xxvij.

Morris's reaction to the unfavourable reviews of *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* published in February 1858. Perhaps it is telling, therefore, that Morris demonstrates a lack of self-confidence in a letter to a publisher in 1857:

> […] I send you some of the poems on the chance of their being of any good, though I should tell you that I scarcely thought it likely you would undertake to publish them at your own risk; I suppose in the case of no other arrangement being possible, you would not object to publishing them at my own expense.[26]

Mackail, Morris's early biographer, argued, however, that Morris was dismissive of literary critics, writing that Morris was:

> […] one who was only happy in his own content, and over whom the opinion of others slipped without leaving much impression. For professional literary criticism, beyond all, his feeling was something between amusement and contempt. 'To think of a beggar making a living by selling his opinion about other people!' he characteristically said: 'and fancy any one paying for it!' he added in a climax of scorn.[27]

Another possible cause for the abandonment of *Scenes* was Morris's marriage to Jane in April 1859. As Kirchhoff states, 'marriage to a beautiful woman and the possibility of an ideal life in an actual setting had removed the need to live out his [Morris's] emotional life in representations of imaginary passion.'[28] Morris was happy and he therefore felt no need to express himself in introspective poetry or prose. It seems that May Morris partially endorses this view in the following observation:

> People always said that my father was one of the happiest of men in his work: but who can know for sure? The long silent nights of writing must represent some struggle in the depths – not all pure enjoyment – the labour out of which the work comes to light. In other forms of the artist's work the struggles and the pleasure of overcoming them are tangible enough; but his difficulties and moments of despondency and self-doubt are rarely, if ever, voiced and truly the worker is lonely to the end.[29]

A third theory is that Morris was just simply too busy with the building and decoration of Red House, his large extended group of friends and fellow artists and the

[26] *Letters,* Vol.1, p.30.
[27] Mackail, Vol. 1, p.134.
[28] Kirchhoff, p. 114.
[29] *C.W.* Vol. XXIV, p.x.

formation and management of the Firm. It is most likely that a combination of all three factors led to the abandonment of his poem, *Scenes From The Fall Of Troy.* Other contemporary projects for Red House were never finished, either. For instance, Burne-Jones completed only three of the seven planned scenes from the romance of *Sire Degrevaunt*, Rossetti's *Dantis Amor* was unfinished and a proposed mural depicting scenes from the *Fall of Troy* was never even started.

Morris began writing his *Scenes From The Fall Of Troy* in 1858 as a sequel to *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems. Scenes* was planned as a series of twelve episodes (or tableaux) centring on the life of the besieged Troy prior to its downfall. Only eight scenes were finished, and those have much of the gritty realism of the Froissartian poems in the *Defence* volume: 'The Haystack in the Flood' and 'Sir Peter Harpdon's End', for example. Indeed, Morris's Sir Peter empathises with the Trojan warriors:

> In a mad whirl of knowing they were wrong;
> Yea, they fought well, and ever, like a man
> That hangs legs off the ground by both his hands,
> Over some great height, did they struggle sore,
> Quite sure to slip at last; wherefore, take note
> How almost all men, reading that sad siege,
> Hold for the Trojans; as I did at least,
> Thought Hector the best knight a long way.[30]
>
> (ll. 1-8)

Morris was clearly attracted to the idea of a group of valiant men fighting against hopeless odds. A case in point is that as an undergraduate, Morris was greatly influenced by Kenelm Henry Digby's[31] book, *The Broadstone of Honour* (1822). This

[30] *C.W.* Vol.1, p.43.

[31] Kenelm Henry Digby (1800-1880) was from a Protestant Anglo-Irish family but converted to Roman Catholicism in 1825. He revised *The Broadstone of Honour* after his conversion and also published *Mores Catholici* (1831-1840), an eleven volume account of the religious, artistic and social life of the peoples of Mediaeval Europe. Never a public figure Digby's works did not achieve the prominence of books such as Newman's *Loss and Gain:The Story of a Convert* (1848). There was, however, a resurgence of interest in him in the early twentieth century as a model convert to Roman Catholicism after the publication of Bernard Holland's *Memoir of Kenelm Henry Digby* (1919).

was, in effect, a manual of chivalric behaviour for the Victorian gentleman. Digby published *Broadstone* anonymously whilst studying at Cambridge. Morris and Digby had much in common. They shared a passion for, and scholarly knowledge of, the history and literature of the Middle Ages. In addition, both men were greatly influenced by the novels of Sir Walter Scott and the poetry of the Romantics. Digby, like Morris,[32] was, furthermore, independently wealthy and, hence, free to devote his time to reading and other scholarly pursuits. As Bernard Holland, Digby's biographer, notes, 'it is an advantage of established property and 'unearned income' that it allows some men to pursue unremunerative occupations which are beneficial to their fellow beings.'[33] Digby's writings influenced many literary figures including Ruskin, Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites. His definition of chivalry, for example, struck a chord with the prevailing contemporary notion of muscular Christianity as an ideal to which all young gentlemen should aspire:

> Chivalry is only a name for that general spirit or state of mind which disposes men to heroic and generous actions and keeps them conversant with all that is beautiful and sublime in the intellectual and moral world. […] As the heroic age is commonly the earliest age in the history of nations, so youth, the first period of human life, may be considered as the heroic or chivalrous age of each separate man.[…] The Anglo-Saxons distinguished the period between childhood and manhood by the term 'cnihthad', boyhood; a term which still continued to indicate the connection between youth and Chivalry when knights were styled children as in the historic song beginning:' Child Rowland to the dark tower came'.[34]

By 1858 when he began writing *Scenes,* Morris's flirtation with Anglo-Catholicism had passed but he undoubtedly empathised with the ideals expressed in *The Broadstone of Honour,* particularly Digby's views on male friendship within the religious Orders of Knights of the Middle Ages. According to Digby, 'the feelings of

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[32] According to MacKail, Morris's annual income in 1854 was around £900, the equivalent of over £50,000 in 2012.

[33] Bernard Holland, *Memoir of Kenelm Henry Digby* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1919), p.6.

[34] Kenelm Henry Digby, *Maxims of Christian Chivalry,* ed. Nicholas Dillon (Hartford, CT: Catholic Authors' Press, 2003), pp. 3-4.

Chivalry, like those of youth, rendered men careless of the pleasures resulting from riches. Friendship was the dearest of its worldly treasures, and poverty was a bond and a test of friendship.'[35] The notion that friendship was the 'dearest of worldly treasures' encapsulated the spirit of Morris's ' Set' which was formed at Oxford and still largely intact in 1858.

In Digby's view, the two great periods of chivalry were the Homeric and the Mediaeval. He refers to the 'high object' [36] of this attribute expressed in Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* and cites the Trojan hero Hector as an exemplar of courtesy:

> Hector feared the reproaches of the Trojan women more than the spears of the Greeks, and the affecting testimony which Helen bears to his gentleness when lamenting his death is proof that in his delicate regard for women he resembled the most perfect knight. [37]

Morris's *Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* was inspired by Arthurian legend and it is unsurprising that he should turn to the Trojan Wars as the subject matter for his next poetic venture. The Matter of Troy greatly interested the Pre-Raphaelites, particularly Morris's mentor, Rossetti.[38] Morris had read Classics at Oxford and possessed a scholarly knowledge of Homer's *Iliad and Odyssey*, most likely through Alexander Pope's eighteenth-century translation. He would also have been familiar with Shakespeare's play *Troilus and Cressida* as well as Chaucer's poem, *Troilus and Criseyde,* which was based on Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato.* Indeed, although Morris's poem is classical in theme, his use of terms such as 'knight' and 'Sir Paris'[39] show that Morris viewed the Trojan War through the prism of mediaeval romance. This is seen in the following lines, for example, where Hector advises Paris of the forthcoming battle:

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[35] Digby, p.129.
[36] Ibid., p.2.
[37] Ibid., p.124.
[38] Rossetti's painting *Helen of Troy* was completed in 1863 and the syncretic poem, *Troy Town,* in 1869.
[39] *C.W.*Vol. XXIV*,* p.10.

> The word is, each in arms we meet straightway
> In Priam's Hall, then out the gate go we;
> And goodly tilting shall the Trojan dames
> See from the walls:[40]
>
> (ll.1-4)

As Kirchhoff has observed, Morris verse reads like an 'imitation of a medieval poem about Troy, in which battle is "goodly tilting" for the "Trojan Dames" to watch from the walls of the city'.[41]

The Matter of Troy was also a favourite subject of many mediaeval writers, particularly in the late fourteenth century. The popular belief was that London had been founded by Brutus, a great-grandson of Aeneas, one of the few Trojans who had survived. This idea was largely due to Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century *Historia Regum Britanniae* (*History of the Kings of Britain*) in which Geoffrey gives an account of the appearance of Diana to Brutus. She tells him that:

> Brute, past the realms of Gaul, beneath the sunset lieth an island , girt about by ocean[…]Seek it! For there is thine abode for ever. There by thy sons again shall Troy be builded; There of thy blood Kings be born, hereafter Sovran in every land the wide world over. [42]

According to the *Historia,* Brutus follows these divine instructions and founds a city, New Troy or *Trinovantum*, on the river Thames. This notion of the *translatio imperii* from the ancient world to contemporary Britain is one that engaged the mediaeval *literati*, especially in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries when the cult of 'Trojanness' reached its peak. Mediaeval writers frequently identified London with Troy and used this as evidence of the former's status as a centre of moral virtue and economic success and, by inference, its prestige. Sylvia Frederico argues that the late mediaeval period was a time when 'representations of the matter of Troy were

[40] Ibid., p.8.
[41] Kirchhoff, p.117.
[42] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain.* Trans. S. Evans and C. W. Dunn. (New York: Dutton, 1958), p.18.

vital to authorial, regnal, and national identity formation'.[43] In relation to this, Frederico cites *Saint Erkenwald,* the anonymous fourteenth-century alliterative poem whose prologue contains the lines:

> Now þat London is neuenyd hatte þe New Troie;
> Þe metropole and þe mayster-toun hit euermore has bene.[44]
> (ll. 25-26)

Mediaeval writers used the myth of Troy to construct idealised versions of their own monarchs, whatever their actual lineage, and their country's identity which reflected England's magnificent heritage. The famous *Sieve Portrait* (c. 1580-1583)[45] of the Tudor Elizabeth I, attributed to Cornelius Ketel, for example, depicts the queen standing in front of a pillar etched with scenes from the *Illiad and Odyssey.* Almost two centuries earlier, in 1393, Richard Maidstone wrote a poem, *Concordia facta inter regem Riccardum II,* which purportedly related the events of the lavish pageant held in honour of the Plantagenet king, Richard II in London in August 1392.[46] Maidstone dedicated the poem to his sovereign with the following words:

> O Richard, as you are allied to me by the double bond of name and authority, I am impelled by Friendship and honoured to recount for you in meter the splendid sights which I beheld of late in Trenovant. [47]

To the mediaeval *cognoscente*, the notion of London (and by extension England) as a new Troy was a validation, not only of its present prosperity and moral integrity but, also, of a promise of its great and glorious future.

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[43] Sylvia Frederico, *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. XIX.

[44] Henry L Savage ed., *Saint Erkenwald: A Middle English Poem* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), p. 4.

[45] Figure 12.

[46] This pageant was staged by the citizens of London in order to persuade Richard to restore their customary freedoms which he had suspended following their refusal to lend him large sums of money. Richard imprisoned many city officials, replacing them with his own men, and decreed that the entire income of London was at his personal disposal.

[47] Richard Maidstone, *Concordia facta inter regem Riccardum II et civitatem Londonie* ed. C.R. Smith (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p.163.

There was, however, an obvious paradox in viewing Troy as an exemplum. Troy was, of course, considered a great city-state full of brave men but, according to mediaeval versions of its history, it was eventually destroyed by lust and treachery from within. This belief was problematic as, although England was 'historically' linked to a grand city-empire, these Trojan origins, according to D.W. Robertson, were an 'inspiration, but also served as a warning for the English.'[48] The original Troy was sacked by outsiders (the Greeks) but only *after* it had been weakened by the cowardly behaviour of its own citizens. As Frederico notes, 'the troubling implication of this aspect of the Trojan legacy was that London, too, was full of deviant rulers whose passions would lead to the destruction of the city.'[49] Mediaeval writers had to tread carefully, therefore. Maidstone, in his *Concordia,* describes Richard II as more handsome than Paris (the man whose weakness and lust brought about the destruction of Troy), but judiciously adds that *his* king, Richard, is 'peace-making, clement and careful to destroy nothing good.'[50]

It was perhaps Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (*c*.1386) that influenced Morris most, however. Chaucer's treatment of the myth of Troy is quite different from that of his contemporaries and his sources in that he claims to make no attempt to relate the history of Troy. Instead, Chaucer's stated intention is to recount the tragic story of Troilus's love for Criseyde:

> The double sorwe of Troilus to tellen,
> That was the kyng Priamus sone of Troye,
> In lovynge, how his aventures fellen,
> Fro wo to wele, and after out of joie,
> My purpose is, er that I parte fro ye.
> (ll. 1-5)[51]

[48] D.W. Robertson, *Chaucer's London* (New York: Wiley, 1968), p.3.
[49] Frederico, p. 2.
[50] *Concordia,* p.167.
[51] Riverside Chaucer, p. 473.

Chaucer does, nevertheless, through his employment of a fictional source, the historian Lollius,[52] succeed, as C.D. Benson argues, 'in giving the story a historical plausibility and depth not found in [Boccaccio's] *Filostrato',*[53] notwithstanding his selective use of the historical 'facts'. As Benson states, Chaucer 'had no hesitation in contaminating the historical record with his own pseudo-historical additions or with material from the non-historical tradition.'[54] After all, the poet was writing during a politically turbulent period. Richard II's Scottish campaign in 1385 had been a disaster and his subsequent policy of *rapprochement* with France was unpopular in many quarters. He was also notorious for his extravagance as well as his propensity to elevate his favourites to positions of power. Richard was perceived by many of his subjects as an unworthy inheritor of the legacy of Edward III, the victor at Crécy in 1346 and founder of the chivalric Order of the Garter in 1348. Throughout his reign, Richard was plagued, as Frederico notes, by a sense of 'chivalric impotence'.[55] Chaucer could not possibly have foreseen Richard's eventual deposition in 1399, but he was a member of parliament and politically astute: following a particular unsettled time, Chaucer left his royal appointment at the Customs in December 1386. Two centuries later, in 1602, Thomas Speght edited a version of the complete works of Chaucer and noted in his introduction that:

> Yet it seemth that hee was in some trouble in the dais of King Richard the 2[…] For living in such troublesome times, wherin few knew what parts to take, no maruell if he came into some danger, nay great maruell that he fell not into great danger[as he] kept himself much out of the way.[56]

[52] In *The Workes of Ovr Ancient and Learned English Poet, Geffrey Chaucer* (1602), Thomas Speght lends credence to the existence of Lollius by describing him as 'an Italian historiographer borne in the citie of Vrbine.' f.144.
[53] C. David Benson, *The History of Troy in Middle English Literature.* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1980), p.136.
[54] Benson, p.134.
[55] Frederico, p. 90.
[56] Speght, p. c.j.

It is interesting that Speght, who lived during the threat of invasion by Spain, the uprising of the Irish and the Earl of Essex's rebellion against Elizabeth I in 1601, considered the late fourteenth century to be particularly 'troublesome times'. It is possible that Chaucer was, in *Troilus and Criseyde,* expressing some concerns about the state of his own society. John McCall argues that Chaucer's love story and the Trojan War are made parallel in *Troilus: '*Chaucer adapted the tragedy of Troy as a suitable background for the tragedy of Troilus,[57] and […] he made the characters, careers and fortunes of the two parallel and even analogous.'[58] The logical extension to this argument is that, if London is the New Troy, then Chaucer was, in fact, imagining London's (and England's) imminent self-destruction.

Morris, like Chaucer, found in the fall of Troy a paradigm for the perceived decline of Britain in his own age. On this subject, Thompson states that:

> the great legend is used […] as the setting within which the heroic values lost to the nineteenth century can be evoked with freshness and conviction. It is true that the sense of failure is ever-present. But the forces, human and natural, making for failure are evoked with a sense of active conflict, rather than recorded with passive nostalgia. Courage, beauty, endurance, wisdom-all are overthrown but their value is never denied.[59]

Scenes From The Fall Of Troy represents a shift in genre from the lyric to the narrative mode which was to dominate Morris's poetry for the next decade. (This will be explored in depth in Chapter Three of this thesis). One especially interesting aspect of *Scenes* is the manner in which Morris depicts the legendary characters and how his representations differ from those of his sources, Homer, Shakespeare and Chaucer. These differences, along with the alterations Morris made to his

[57] Troilus does, in fact, mean 'little Troy'.
[58] John McCall, 'The Trojan Scene in Chaucer's *Troilius' Journal of English Literary History*, 29 (1962), pp. 263-75, (p.263).
[59] Thompson, p. 113.

original draft of the poem,[60] give some insight into Morris's nascent eco-social thought.

(ii) Social equality and the sense of community.

It is difficult at first sight to see concerns about class inequality in *Scenes* for, as in the Arthurian poems of the *Defence* volume, all the named characters are aristocratic. Morris, however, heightens the contrast between the actions of the two legendary characters, Hector and Paris. Hector is the unselfish hero who lays down his life for his people even though he believes the cause is hopeless. His brother, Paris , the prince whose impetuous actions instigated the siege of Troy, is portrayed by Morris, initially at least, as rather shallow and self-centred. In addition, Morris depicts the characters with a greater realism than that of his sources.

Hector is the epitome of selfless manhood and is undeniably brave. He never expresses any doubt about the righteousness of the Trojans' cause nor does he censure Paris or Helen. In this Morris seems to emulate Chaucer who describes Hector as 'piteous of nature'.[61] In *The Iliad,* however, Hector laments the adverse effect Helen has on his younger brother:

> And now, the warriors passing on the way,
> The graceful Paris first excused his stay.
> To whom the noble Hector thus replied:
> "Thy power in war and justice none contest;
> Known is thy courage, and thy strength confess'd.
> What pity sloth should seize a soul so brave,
> Or godlike Paris live a woman's slave."[62]
>
> (ll. 39-46)

[60] The original draft of *Scenes From The Fall Of Troy* written on blue vellum paper in Morris's own hand was bequeathed to the British Library by May Morris in 1938. MS. 45321.
[61] *The Riverside Chaucer*, p. 474.
[62] *Homer,* p.124.

In a similar vein, Shakespeare's Hector declares that Helen is 'not worth what she doth cost the holding'[63] although this statement is not motivated by personal antipathy but, rather, Hector's innate sense of morality:

> If Helen, then, be wife to Sparta's King-
> As it is known she is, – these moral laws
> Of Nature and of nations speak aloud
> To have her back return'd; [64]
>
> (Act II Scene ll. ll. 183-6)

Morris's Hector is, however, far more tolerant than Shakespeare's. He does not castigate Helen or Paris but, rather, they blame themselves. In the opening tableau of *Scenes*, entitled 'Helen Arming Paris', Helen is fatalistic and fears that she will have to return to Greece when (*not if*) the Trojans are defeated. Paris tries to reassure her with the words:

> Ah! My sweet Helen
> Full many a day shall we kiss thus and thus
> Before that last day when you kiss me dead,
> An old man lying where the incense burns.[65]
>
> (ll. 24-27)

An analysis of the original handwritten draft of *Scenes* shows clearly that Morris had not initially intended to portray Paris as an optimist. When composing *Scenes,* Morris made comparatively few alterations, apart from a small number of obvious spelling corrections. There are, however, a few occasions where Morris scored out passages and replaced them with lines which alter the meaning considerably. For example, the original version of the lines quoted above reads as follows:

> Ah! My sweet Helen
> Full many a day shall we kiss thus and thus

[63] *Troilus and Cressida,* Act II, Scene II. line 51. *The Windsor Shakespeare* Vol. XVI, ed. Henry N Hudson (London: The Caxton Publishing Co. Ltd, 1910), p.42.
All future quotations are from this volume.
[64] *The Windsor Shakespeare*, p.46.
[65] *C.W.* Vol XXIV, p.4.

Before they cut my throat to reach your *waist*
This is the last will; kiss the place across
Here on the apple!
[She kisses him]
Lower down again!
See near the collar bone.
[He kisses her]
Ah, my sweet Helen
Yea, and I *would* almost that death itself be sweet.[66]

In these sensuous lines (which are by far the most erotic in the whole manuscript), Paris anticipates his own violent death and the repatriation of Helen by the Greeks. The inclusion of the phrase 'this is the last will' implies the imminence of these events rather than the expectation of death in old age as in the final version. It is reasonable to assume that Morris changed these lines in order initially to portray Paris's optimism and then to chart his psychological journey from hope to despair and, finally, to the desire for death.

In *Scenes* Paris starts out with all the optimism of a carefree youth, assured of victory. He confidently tries to reassure a worried Helen by praising the military prowess of his brothers:

Yet I pray you think
Of that great belt of Priam's sons, buckled
By shining Hector the great clasp of all
The unfailing steadfast hearts of my brothers,
Shall they not match the fierce-eyed gloomy Greeks?[67]
(ll. 14-18)

Clearly, it is Hector who is their leader: he is the 'great clasp of all'. The description of him as 'shining' is more fitting of a deity than a man. In this section of *Scenes* Morris also altered his original version. He crossed out eleven lines of dialogue between Paris, Helen and Hector. In the first few deleted lines Paris attempts to reassure Helen by extoling Hector's prowess as a warrior:

[66] British Library, MS. 45321 f.8. (Italicised words are difficult to decipher). Figure 13.
[67] *C.W.* Vol. XXIV, p.7.

Feel you no safer seeing how he walks
Making the feathers on his helmet nod
And his heaving hands half open swinging down?[68]

After an exchange of greetings, however, the following dialogue between Hector and Paris occurs:

Paris

Nay, fair brother, is it essay?

Hector

Yea, essay as may *be?* Leave it by anything
Perfay, my Paris! For this autumn we
Shall never dig it up, fresh shall it be
Where you could *back* this foe.[69]

The above lines convey a mood of pessimism on the part of Hector which Morris clearly wished to omit in his finished version. Elsewhere in *Scenes,* Hector is depicted as the perfect knight: chivalrous, courteous and fearless, in sharp contrast to the other, flawed characters. The idea that Hector was extraordinarily brave is further supported by an analysis of Hector's death scene (or, rather, his murder by Ajax).The original line 'help follows and my squire' uttered by Hector was deleted by Morris in order to emphasise the fact that the hero was not only physically alone but was also distinguished from the rest of the Trojans by his selfless nobility.

Following the death of Hector, a crucial turning point in the Trojan War, Paris feels despair as he finally acknowledges that defeat is inevitable:

Why I am sick,
Sick unto death, nay but far worse than death –
If indeed ought is worse, for death will come,
For death will come at last.[70]
(ll. 13-16)

[68] B.L MS. 45321 f.14.
[69] Ibid., f.14. (Italicised words are difficult to decipher)
[70] *C. W.* Vol. XXIV, p.26.

Paris's desolation is compounded when he finds himself plotting with his mother, Hecuba, to lure Achilles to the sacred temple of Apollo in order to murder him:

> How Mother, and must I turn stabber too?[71]
>
> (l. 21)

The knowledge that his own desires have led to the death of so many Trojans and the destruction of Troy, added to his realisation that war is not noble but has 'all come to stabbing in the dark',[72] leads Paris to welcome death as a release from the horrors of life:

> Now must I go where Jove will send me to,
> One kiss at last, one bitter bitter kiss,
> O life and death together, Sweet Helen![73]
>
> (ll. 22-24)

Throughout *Scenes*, Morris emphasises the brutality of war. Morris was not, himself, a pacifist[74] and had no ethical objection to war provided the cause was just. Morris was, however, neither jingoistic nor ignorant of the true cost of war. In 1876, when Britain seemed on the brink of war with Russia following its incursions over the borders of Turkey, Morris wrote to *The Daily News* expressing his opposition to any

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[71] Ibid., p.31.
[72] Ibid., p.30.
[73] Ibid., p.39.
[74] Morris's own early views on war are not recorded, but in 1852 he did refuse to go with the rest of his family to the Duke of Wellington's funeral. Morris's reluctance to attend the memorial for the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army could be seen as being related to an ethical objection to military force. Conversely, Morris may have been exercising his autonomy (he spent the day riding in Epping Forest and visiting Waltham Abbey); he was eighteen years old and no longer subject to the authority of his father who had died a few years earlier. Furthermore, in 1860 Morris, along with several other Pre-Raphaelites, joined the newly formed 38th Middlesex (Artists) Rifle Volunteers (The Artists Rifles). This Corps of Artists was part of The Volunteer Corps founded in 1859 by Lord Peel in response to the patriotic zeal engendered by the threat of invasion by France. The regiment's badge consisted of two heads: Mars, the God of War and Minerva, the Goddess of Wisdom. This pairing of war and wisdom as the regimental motto (*Cum Marte Minerva*) underpinned the contemporary prevailing attitude towards military force. War in the name of a righteous cause was a noble pursuit. There is, however, only one record of Morris's attendance at a regimental camp in June 1861 and he was only a member for a short period. 'The influence of the Pre-Raphaelite group […] appears to have been more social than military!', according to the Regiment's website. (www.artistsreflesassociation.org (accessed 23/02/2013). Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Morris would have enlisted in *any* military organisation whilst espousing pacifist views.

military action stating, 'For surely, even the Earl of Beaconsfield [Disraeli] must hesitate before signing the death warrant of so many men'.[75] What is even more striking than Morris's realistic representation of war, though, is his portrayal of the various protagonists' despair and sense of hopelessness. Morris writes about a society destroyed by war but, through his characters' diverse reactions to the conflict, Morris evokes the moral complexities of war. For example, in a bid to maintain Trojan morale, King Priam, the consummate politician, focuses on the heroism of his people and asserts that to a warrior death is akin to a pleasing sleep, rather than an event to be feared:

> All my knights who fought
> That morning on the sands are here, but those
> Who fell asleep amid the melody
> Of meeting swords. (ll. 6-9)[76]

He compares the Trojans' comfortable existence to that of the Greeks, emphasising their losses in battle and also the immorality of Greek women:

> The autumn damps have slain
> Full many a mother's son, those who are left
> Keep growing gaunt and ugly as thin wolves
> While we feed fat; their white wives left behind
> Are childless these nine years, or take new lords
> And bear another bred of hostile son[77]
> (ll.23-8)

Throughout *Scenes* Morris captures the feelings of the protagonists as they change over time. The youthful Paris at first views the war as a chivalric adventure, but following the death of Hector he comes to comprehend the true horror of the war for which he is responsible:

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[75] *Letters,*Vol. I, p.325.
[76] *C. W.* Vol. XXIV, p. 9.
[77] Ibid., p. 9.

But now – alas! My honour is all gone
And all the joy of fight that I had once
Gone mouldy like the bravery of arms
That lie six feet under the Trojan turf.[78]
(ll. 17-20)

From the above lines it is reasonable to infer, as Faulkner puts it, 'Morris's powerful though ill-defined sense of the un-heroic age'.[79] Morris's Hector is the embodiment of altruism and bravery. He is the perfect hero against whom others, including his father and brother as well as the Greeks, are measured and found wanting. This seems to support Morris's belief that all individuals, irrespective of social status, should do their duty by behaving selflessly for the benefit of the whole community. It was much later before he was explicitly to articulate his thoughts on social equality and fellowship. Morris's ideas, however, can be discerned, albeit in embryonic form, in this early incomplete poem.

(iii) The portrayal of women.

As with Guenevere in the *Defence,* Morris portrays Helen with a degree of psychological complexity. Certainly, in the lines quoted earlier Morris does seem to stereotype Helen as a seductress:

Ah! My sweet Helen
Full many a day shall we kiss thus and thus
Before they cut my throat to reach your *waist*
This is the last will; kiss the place across
Here on the apple![80]

Morris's use of the phrase, 'Here on the apple!' not only heightens the eroticism but, in addition, the reference to 'apple' has the effect of associating Helen with the original fallen woman, Eve. It is interesting, however, that Morris chose to delete

[78] Ibid., p.30.
[79] *Against the Age,* p.38.
[80] B.L. MS. 45321. f.8.

these lines and thus remove the implication of Helen's promiscuity.[81] In the 'final' version of this scene, Helen does, in fact, hold herself culpable for the destruction of the city and people of Troy by her seduction of Paris:

> Lips upon lips is surely a sweet game;
> But I have ruined you, oh poor Paris,
> My poor kind knight, who never for himself
> Would look a yard before his sweet grey eyes;
> Who taught me how to live, when long ago
> I had forgotten that the world was fair
> And I was fair: who made my lying down
> Right peaceful to my tired heart and limbs,
> Who made my waking sweet to rested eyes,
> Who gave me joyful hours day by day.[82]
>
> (ll. 27-36)

In the above passage it is evident that Helen loves Paris, but the words 'I have ruined you, oh poor Paris' imply that she considers herself responsible for the current situation. The idea of Helen as a destructive force is also later reinforced by Morris when Talthybius, the Greek emissary, warns the Trojans that:

> 'Yet deadly shall Queen Helen be to you.'[83]
>
> (l. 33)

Helen's sin of adultery is, like that of Guenevere, mitigated by the fact that she was in a loveless marriage: she describes her husband as 'My old chain Menelaus'.[84] Accordingly, the ultimate fate of both Guenevere and Helen is similar. Helen is captured by the Greeks and re-incarcerated in a loveless marriage: Guenevere, in 'King Arthur's Tomb', endures self-imposed imprisonment in a nunnery.

Shortly after the death of Paris,[85] Helen is given to her lover's brother, Deiphobus, as a reward for his bravery in battle. Traditionally, Helen's entering into a

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[81] It could also be argued that Morris deleted the lines because he feared that his audience would find them too sexually explicit.
[82] *C.W.* Vol. XXIV, p.4.
[83] Ibid., p.10.
[84] Ibid., p.3.
[85] 'The Death of Paris' appears in *The Earthly Paradise* and, according to the original draft (British Library MS. 45321), Morris never intended to include it in *Scenes From The Fall Of Troy.*

relationship with Deiphobus so soon after Paris's death is seen as evidence of her promiscuity. Morris's Helen, however, is depicted rather differently as she clearly still loves Paris and mourns his loss:

> Shall I live sometimes
> In these old days whereof this is the last,
> Yea shall I live sometimes with sweet Paris
> In that old happiness 'twixt mirth and tears,
> The fitting on of arms and going forth,
> The dreadful quiet sitting while they fought,
> The kissing when he came back to my arms
> And all that I remember like a tale?[86]
> (ll.22-9)

Helen has been forced to become the mistress of Deiphobus just as many women in Morris's own time were forced into marriage (or often less respectable relationships) by social and economic imperatives.

Although Helen is almost universally acknowledged as the cause of the Trojan war, writers before Morris had portrayed her as passive. In *The Iliad,* for example, Helen's speech to Hector, in which she calls him 'brother', is interrupted with the derogatory aside:

> (if the guilty dame
> That caused these woes deserve a sister's name!)[87]
> (ll.14-15)

Throughout *The Iliad* Helen is depicted as a rather docile captive who yearns for her husband and homeland:

> This said, the many-coloured maid inspires
> Her husband's love, and wakes her former fires;
> Her country, parents, all that once were dear,
> Rush to her thought, and force a tender tear,[88]
> (ll. 27-30)

[86] *C. W.* Vol XXIV*,* p.45.
[87] Homer, *The Iliad and Odyssey* trans. Alexander Pope (London: Frederick Warne and Co, 1880), p.119.
[88] Homer, p.55.

Shakespeare, too, represents Helen as a passive object abducted from her husband by Paris. In the prologue to *Troilus and Cressida*, for example, Shakespeare succinctly summarises the reason for the Trojan War:

> The ravish'd Helen, Menelaus' Queen
> With wanton Paris sleeps; and that's the quarrel,[89]
> (ll. 9-10)

Morris's Helen, however, has far more psychological depth. In the first of two versions of 'Helen's Chamber', the scene prior to Paris's death, Helen tries to dissuade Paris from fighting even though he is haunted by the consequences of his actions:

> Comfort you Paris, hope for better days
> And live, my sweet, live with me this one day
> Merrily, sound the harps with some sweet strain;
> Is not this living? Lo forget all woes
> And stay at home today and do not die.
> Time will there be for dying after all
> When the first Greek sets hostile foot in Troy.[90]
> (ll. 8-14)

In the second version of 'Helen's Chamber', Morris portrays her as being potentially even more culpable. She decides that she will try and persuade Paris to run away with her, thus, abandoning his comrades:

> If he comes back then will I say to him
> What now I should have said: Paris, tonight
> With twenty chosen men come forth with me,
> Come down upon the beach and sail we forth
> Where Jove shall lead us and the mighty winds,
> And let the Greeks and Trojans fight their fight
> Or do whatso they list, but we will live
> Apart from strife till we grow old and die.[91]
> (ll. 1-8)

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[89] *The Windsor Shakespeare*, p.9.
[90] *C.W.* Vol. XXIV, p.35.
[91] Ibid., p.40.

Such a cowardly act would, of course, be anathema to any Trojan warrior. Morris's depiction of Helen is quite different from that of previous writers who style her as a woman forcibly 'released' from the hegemony of one patriarch, only to be subjugated by another. Morris's Helen attempts to influence Paris by luring him away from his duties as a knight. She even tries to dissuade Hector, the bravest of the Trojans, with the pragmatic statement:

> Better a live dog than a dead lion, dear.[92]
> (l. 23)

Helen says this, however, after her declaration that the Trojans' defeat is inevitable and her acknowledgement that she is to blame:

> – do you think
> We can be happy in the end, Paris?
> I shudder when I think of those fell men
> Who every day stand around Troy Town
> And every night wipe the rust of their spears.[93]
> (ll. 30-34)

Helen, like Morris's Guenevere, does not merely function here as a one-dimensional character. She feels human emotions, lust, guilt and fear for example, but she can also empathise with the brave Greek soldiers even though they are about to sack Troy:

> They are become my mine enemies, yet still
> I am half grieved for their unspoken woes,
> And longings for the merry fields of Greece:
> They know themselves to be but ruined men
> Whatever happens – Doubt not they will win
> Their dreadful slow revenge at last, Paris.[94]
> (ll. 6-11)

She is also pragmatic, however, with an innate sense of self-preservation as her suggestion to Paris to 'let the Greeks and Trojans fight their fight' demonstrates.

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[92] Ibid., p.7.
[93] Ibid., p.6.
[94] *C.W.* Vol. XXIV, p.7.

Helen, although she feels guilty, would still be happy to escape with Paris and abandon the Trojans to their fate. Finally, as the Greeks overrun Troy, she is forced to help Menelaus kill Deiphobus and then is raped in the bloody bed. In a state of despair, she is not allowed the refuge of death even though she begs Menelaus to kill her:

> Here give it to me, feel here upon my breasts,
> Smite so betwixt them with the sword I pray.[95]
> (ll.2-3)

Rape has often been a consequence of war. On this point Maria Mies has stated that 'the militarization of men […] always implies violence against, and the degradation of, women.'[96] Mies, however, advances the eco-feminist theory that there is a correlation between the sexual violence women experience at the hands of the enemy during military conflicts and their social and economic dominance by their own male compatriots. She, in relation to this, states that:

> [there is a] close connection between warfare against a foreign peoples and warfare against women in the form of rape. The discussion on rape and warfare or militarism for long centred on the question of whether men are inherently more aggressive than women. The root cause was thus sought in the psychological and physiological differences between men and women, while the economic and political context was often ignored.[97]

Rape is the violent manifestation of the dominance of a man over a woman and consequently Menelaus's violation of Helen, chillingly described by Morris, demonstrates her absolute subjugation:

> Ah struggle, Helen, nought shall it avail,
> Yea but I am the stronger in the wrists:
> Feel the steel sword-point cold against your skin
> And so lie quiet – ah but you hate me –

[95] Ibid., p.48.
[96] Maria Mies, 'Women have no Fatherland' *Ecofeminsim* eds. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2014), p.123.
[97] Mies, p. 123.

I loved you once[98]

(ll. 5-9)

Morris's depiction of Helen, unlike that of his sources, is nuanced and realistic and reveals much of Morris's concern for the position of women in his time. Helen is neither saint nor sinner, but a flawed human being. She feels love, fear, lust and empathy with others but she also has an instinctive sense of self-preservation. As a woman in a patriarchal society, however, she, like women in Morris's era, has no real autonomy.

(iv) The importance of nature and the environment

In the scene entitled 'The Defiance of the Greeks', King Priam of Troy reminds his people of the futility of the Greeks' long siege:

> What won they, Sirs, but harm?
> With hale and how they drew their ships ashore
> And made them walls betwixt the grass and the sea;
> They pitched their tents upon the soft green grass –
> Their tents were white upon the green meadows
> Nine years ago.[99]
>
> (ll. 15-20)

Morris's use of the bucolic term 'green meadows' indicates that he was associating Troy with England. Although the historical remains of Troy were not discovered until 1822,[100] their geographical location was Turkey, not a country noted for its lush green terrain. The 'green earth'[101] of that 'right fair town of Troy'[102] is being attacked by the invading Greeks. Morris is using the destruction of Troy by greed and lust for wealth as a paradigm for the ruin of Britain's landscape, society and culture by industrialisation. Morris's belief, as shown here, that the well-being of society is

[98] *C.W.* Vol. XXIV, p. 48.
[99] *C.W.* Vol. XXIV, p. 9.
[100] Charles McLaren discovered what is believed to be the ruins of ancient Troy at Hassarlik on the north coast of Turkey in 1822. Heinrich Schliemann later excavated the ruins from 1870-1890.
[101] *C.W.* Vol. XXIV, p.3.
[102] Ibid., p.3.

inextricably linked with the condition of the natural world is a fundamental tenet of modern eco-social criticism. As Jonathan Bate has stated 'ecological exploitation is always coordinate with social exploitation.' [103] This idea was not, however, entirely new in the nineteenth century. According to Rigby, it was foreshadowed a century earlier by Rousseau who argued in his *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality among Men* (1754) that 'the progress of civilisation in the domination of nature had been achieved at the price of increased social inequality and military conflict.'[104] Morris's belief that the environment should not be exploited by humans ran counter to the contemporary prevailing view, which was that nature existed in order to be conquered and transformed by man. The conviction that humans had a divine right to dominate the natural world is rooted in the story of the Creation in Genesis I which, according to Lyn White, 'not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends.'[105] This idea has been promulgated throughout the ages. In his *Novum Organum Scientarium* (1620), for example, Francis Bacon argued that, through arts and sciences, humankind could 'recover that right over nature which belongs to it by divine bequest [and] establish and extend the power and dominion of the human race over the earth.'[106] The hypothesis that nineteenth-century industrialists and *entrepreneurs* were motivated exclusively by religious conviction is debatable, however. The contemporary belief that man's hegemony over nature was 'righteous' was, according to Rigby, a convenient validation for a 'mechanistic and atomistic

[103] Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge. 1991), p. 48.
[104]Kate Rigby, 'Ecocriticism' *Introducing Criticism at the Twenty-First Century,* ed. Julian Wolfreys. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), pp. 151-78, (p.162).
[105] Lynn White, 'The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis'. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* eds. Gotfelty & Fromm. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), p.10.
[106] Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum* (1620) *Works Vol 4* ed. Spedding, Ellis & Heath (London: Longmans Green, 1870), pp 114-115.

view of nature'[107] which was 'highly congenial to the laissez-faire mercantile capitalism, and associated colonialist ventures'.[108]

Morris's vision of a perfect unspoilt land appears in the following early (*c*. 1860) draft of 'The Man Who Never Laughed Again' which was published in 1868 as part of *The Earthly Paradise* but written around the same time as *Scenes:*

> Fair was the world beyond what words can tell,
> A broad vale, blessed with wealth of fruitful trees,
> Above the golden grain, adorned well
> With wondrous flowers, fair mines of moaning bees:[109]
> (ll. 3-6)

The above lines read like a description of the countryside surrounding Morris's own Red House in Bexleyheath. The people of Morris's idyllic land, like the Trojans, will be destroyed by their apathy and are blissfully unaware of their fate:

> Because the lord of that house did begin
> Another day of ease and revelry
> To make it harder yet for him to die
> And each now, perfumed and garlanded,
> The guests passed clad in wonderful attire
> And this and that one through the archway led
> Some girl made languid by the rosy fire
> Of those sweet days; with love and faint desire
> The air filled, how should those young folk see
> The eyes unspoken misery.[110]
> (ll. 1-10)

In later life, Morris frequently articulated his views on the environmental effects of mass industrial production. In 1877, for example, he argued that factories would only 'blacken rivers, hide the sun and poison the air with smoke or worse'.[111] He believed, furthermore, that the same forces in society which despoil nature are those which subjugate human beings. And these concerns can be discerned in this early incomplete poem.

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[107] Rigby, pp. 151-78.
[108] Ibid.
[109] William Morris, *The Man Who Never Laughed Again,* BL, MS. 45299. f.31 .
[110] Ibid., f. 29.
[111] Morris, 'The Lesser Arts' (1877) www.marxist.org Accessed 04/11/12.

(v) The folly of materialism

The first scene of the tableaux, like the entirety of 'The Defence of Guenevere', could be read as an allegory of the moral and social impoverishment of Morris's own era. Helen is, in effect, symbolic of material wealth, like Lady Meed in Langland's *Piers Plowman*. Morris alludes to this in the second scene, 'The Defiance of the Greeks', when the Greek emissary, Talthybius, demands the return of their queen 'gold-crowned and robed with gold'.[112] The Trojans' desire to possess her leads to their death or slavery and the destruction of the 'green earth'.[113] *Scenes* is a Victorian conceptualization of a mediaeval romance on a Greek theme and reveals many of Morris's anxieties about his contemporary society. It is Hector, the ideal knight and epitome of integrity, against whom all the other characters are measured. And, just as the loss of Hector causes despair among his people and, ultimately, leads to the fall of Troy, so too the decline of social and moral values indicates a malaise in Victorian society. In *Scenes,* Morris expresses his unease concerning the situation of women as victims of patriarchal hegemony although this is often tempered by the more conventional stereotype of Woman as Temptress. Additionally, by using Helen as a metaphor for riches, Morris also points to the destructive nature of the desire for accumulation of wealth both for humans and to the environment.

[112] *C.W.* Vol. XXIV, p.11.
[113] Ibid., p.3.

(III) *The Life and Death of Jason.*

(i) Introduction

In May 1867, *The Life and Death of Jason* was published at Morris's own expense by Bell and Daldy. Only five hundred copies were initially produced, but over the next few years the poem sold over three thousand copies in its seven editions. Originally entitled *The Deeds of Jason,* it had been intended for inclusion in *The Earthly Paradise,* the series of poetic narratives first published in 1868, but, as *Jason* became too long, Morris decided to issue it as a separate volume.[114] There was also another reason, however, and it was connected to the critical 'failure' of *Defence* and which also demonstrates Morris's early business acumen by engaging in a form of market research. Before incurring the costs of publishing *The Earthly Paradise* in its entirety Morris decided to, as his daughter May puts it, 'gauge the taste of the public for this form of poetic work: the romantic narrative.'[115] He need not have worried, as *Jason* was a great success, receiving almost universal critical acclaim. In an unsigned review in the *Sunday Times* in June 1867, for example, Joseph Knight wrote that:

> Taken as a whole, it strikes us as one of the most beautiful, complete, and unearthly poems we have ever read.[…] No single idea about it seems to have even the slightest reference to any modern thought or feeling.[…] Its verse has a strange melody, the full sense and significance of which are not at first acquired. Its pictures are sharp, well-defined, and often of superlative beauty.[116]

Knight's remark that 'no single idea about it seems to have even the slightest reference to any modern thought or feeling' suggests that *Jason* offered the Victorian readers escapism rather than realism. In another unsigned review in October 1867, Henry James concludes with a similar assessment of the poem's appeal. 'To the

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[114] *The Life and Death of Jason* comprises seventeen books of approximately eleven thousand lines in total.
[115] *C. W.* Vol II*,* p.xiv.
[116] Ibid.*,* p. 52.

jaded intellects of the present moment, distracted with the strife, creeds and the conflicts of theories, it opens a glimpse into a world where they will be called upon neither to choose, to criticise, nor to believe, but to listen.'[117] *Jason* provided an alternative world to that of industrial Britain and it was, as Faulkner has noted, 'a world which many enjoyed entering.'[118]

Morris may have offered a form of escapism to his initial audience, but that does not preclude the notion that his poetry was a critique of Victorian society as well. He frequently lamented the detrimental effects that contemporary industrial practices had on both people and the environment. Art (in all its forms) and Beauty were standards by which society was to be measured and, in his own time, served to emphasise the damage inflicted by the exploitative praxis of capitalism. In one of his earliest lectures, 'The Lesser Arts' (1877), Morris argues that:

> If you can really fill your minds with memories of great works of art, you will, I think, be able to a certain extent to look through the aforesaid ugly surroundings, and will be moved to discontent of what is careless and brutal now, and will, I hope, at least be so discontented with what is bad, that you will determine to bear no longer that short-sighted, reckless brutality of squalor that so disgraces our intricate civilisation.[119]

Two years later, in a lecture delivered to the Birmingham Society of Arts and School of Design in 1879, Morris contends that 'Art is a very serious thing, and cannot by any means be dissociated from the weighty matters that occupy the thoughts of men'.[120] At the time of writing *Jason*, Morris may not have felt 'compelled to engage directly with the harsh world of Victorian society',[121] as Bradley Macdonald puts it, but he could not help but express his antagonism to it in his poetry.

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[117] *The Critical Heritage*, p.76.
[118] Ibid., p.9.
[119] *C.W.* Vol. XXII, p.16.
[120] Ibid., p.29.
[121] Bradley J. Macdonald, *William Morris and the Aesthetic Constitution of Politics* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 1999), p.76.

Morris would have been particularly pleased with the review by his friend, the poet Algernon C. Swinburne, which appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* in July 1867:

> In direct narrative power, in clear forthright manner of procedure, not seemingly troubled to select, to pick and sift and winnow, yet never superfluous or verbose, never straggling or jarring; in these high qualities it resembles the work of Chaucer. […] In all the noble roll of our poets there has been since Chaucer no second teller of tales, no second rhapsode comparable to the first, till the advent of this one.[122]

In this extract, Swinburne points to the shift in genre from lyric to narrative mode from Morris's earlier published work, *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems,* more specifically following the conventions of mediaeval romance: typically, a quest undertaken whilst the knight adheres to the chivalric ideals of courage, loyalty, honour and mercy towards one's adversary.

As we have seen, Morris had a great admiration for classical, as well as mediaeval, literature. It not only inspired his early poetic works such as *Scenes* and *Jason,* however, for he also published his own translations of Virgil's *Aeneid*[123] in 1876 and Homer's *Odyssey* in 1887.[124] In his later political lectures and writings, furthermore, Morris frequently drew on Greek mythology to address contemporary problems. In 'Art and Socialism', a lecture first delivered in 1884, Morris argued vigorously that the profit imperative of capitalism was destroying the environment:

> Less lucky than King Midas, our green fields and clear waters, nay, the very air we breathe, are turned not to gold (which might please some of us for an hour maybe) but to dirt; and to speak plainly we know full well that under the present gospel of Capital not only there is no hope of bettering it, but that things grow worse year by year, day by day. Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die, choked by filth. [125]

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[122] *The Critical Heritage,* p.60.
[123] William Morris, *The Aeneids of Virgil Done into English* (London: Ellis and White,1876).
[124] William Morris, *The Odyssey of Homer Done into English Verse* (London: Reeves & Turner, 1887).
[125] *C.W.* Vol. XXIII, pp.198-9.

Some ten years later, in an article published in *Justice,* Morris claimed as he had many times before, that industrial and scientific 'progress' was compounding class inequality and making society as a whole much poorer:

> Was it all to end in a counting-house on the top of a cinder-heap with Podsnap's drawing-room in the offing, and a Whig committee dealing out champagne to the rich and margarine to the poor in such convenient proportions as would make all men contented together, though the pleasure of the eyes was gone from the world, and the place of Homer was to be taken by Huxley?[126]

According to Silver,[127] the source for Morris's *Jason* was the earliest extant version of the myth, the *Argonautica* by Apollonius Rhodius, the third-century Greek poet and scholar. Lindsay, however, states that Morris was first introduced to the legend of Jason via Euripides' *Medea* which he studied in 1852 (prior to entrance into Oxford) with his tutor, the Reverend F.B. Guy.[128] Morris was also familiar with William Caxton's *The History of Jason* (*c.*1477) which was translated from the French romance by Raoul Le Fevre. Indeed, according to John Munro, Morris had prepared a copy of Caxton's romance for publication by the Kelmscott Press, although the copy was not used.[129]

As has been previously stated, Morris originally intended to produce *Jason* as part of *The Earthly Paradise* in collaboration with his friend, Burne-Jones, who was to do the illustrations or, more correctly, the decorations. The idea had been to produce a book 'that would recapture something of the impressive style of fine

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[126] Ibid., p.280. 'How I became a Socialist'. Morris's reference is to Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895), the eminent biologist and grandfather of Aldous Huxley.

[127] Silver, p.50. In addition, Florence Boos contends that Morris may also have drawn on Ovid's *Heroides,* Seneca's *Medea,* Diodorus's *History* and the *Argonautica* of Apollodorus. See 'Medea and Circe in the Poetry of Morris and Webster'. *Writing on the Image: Reading William Morris,* ed. David Latham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 43-60.

[128] F.B. Guy who would later, much to Morris's amusement, adopt *Jason* as a text in his school, noted the similarities between Euripides' play & Morris's *Jason.*

[129] After his death in 1896, Morris's type-written copy of the romance was given by his Executors to the Early English Text Society. This copy formed the basis of the Society's publication in 1913 of Caxton's *The History of Jason* edited by John Munro.

incunabula'[130] and they spent many hours planning what they called the Big Book of Stories in Verse. Due to Morris's abandonment of Red House and other claims on his own and Burne-Jones's time, however, that particular joint venture never came to fruition. They were, though, later to collaborate on Morris's *Love is Enough* (1873).

It is easy to see how attractive the legend of Jason and the Argonauts was to Morris. Not only does it deal with three great themes (love, fate and death) but it is also the tale of a fellowship of noble young men setting out on a quest to seek fame. With reference to Morris's novel, *News from Nowhere* (1890), Paul Meier argues that Morris's brand of socialism had five principle characteristics: happiness, fellowship, toleration, universal courtesy and a delight in life and the material world.[131] These themes are also present in *The Life and Death of Jason.*

(ii) Social equality and the sense of community

It is, at first, difficult to discern any comment about social equality in *Jason* as most of the named characters are either aristocratic or gods. Morris does, however, as in *Scenes from the Fall of Troy,* define the heroic ideal against which all men are measured and (sometimes) found wanting. In *Scenes,* for example, Hector and Paris are both aristocratic by birth but it is Hector's noble character and selfless actions that distinguish him from other men. He functions as a paradigm for the ideal man whereas Paris, selfish and weak, serves as a negative exemplum. An instance of this juxtaposition occurs early on in *Jason.* As in the *Argonautica*, Morris's Jason is given as a child to Chiron in order to protect him from his uncle, Pelias, who has seized the throne of Iolchos from Jason's father, Æson. Jason enjoys a happy

[130] Joseph R. Dunlap, *The Book That Never Was* (New York: Oriole Editions, 1971), p. 45.
[131] Paul Meier, *William Morris, The Marxist Dreamer* Vol. II, trans. Frank Gubb (Sussex: Harvester,1978), p. 578.

childhood with the wise centaur and grows up to be a 'mighty hero great of limb'[132] and his early life is sharply contrasted with Pelias's existence. Despite his material wealth and power, Pelias was 'so fearful of so many a thing',[133] not least the prophesy that he would lose his kingdom to a half-shod man. The terror of forfeiting his throne drives Pelias to mistreat his subjects:

> A terror to his folk
> He grew to be, and grinding was his yolk.[134]
> (ll. 11-12)

The parallel between Pelias's greed and that of the competitive capitalists of Morris's time is obvious. Pelias's ignoble behaviour does not bring him (or his people) happiness but, rather, a dishonourable death when he is slain by his daughters. In the following lines Pelias's fate is described as a type of poetic justice:

> So, following up the poor unkingly bier
> Of him who erst for love of gain and fear
> Had sent them forth to what he deemed their end,
> (ll. 31-33)[135]

Indeed, failure to live up to the heroic ideal has disastrous consequences throughout the poem. Hylas, (one of the Argonauts), for example, is bewitched and then drowned by the Mysian nymphs. He is, however, only overcome by the sprites *after* he strays 'governed by some wayward star'[136] from his comrades and discards his weapons and armour:

> "O sweet,
> Call it an omen that this nowise meet
> For deeds of love, has left me by its will,
> And now for mine these toys that cumber still[137]
> (ll. 22-25)

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[132] *C.W.* Vol. II, p.18.
[133] Ibid., p.8.
[134] Ibid., p.8.
[135] Ibid., p.251.
[136] Ibid., p.64.
[137] Ibid., p.68.

The phrase 'toys that cumber' suggests that Hylas does not take his role as an Argonaut seriously. By physically removing his arms (which are symbolic of his noble status *and* his knightly duty,) Hylas allows himself to fall prey to the seductive charms of the nymphs. Morris seems to be setting the heroic code against self-indulgent sensuality here.[138] Jason, too, despite his undoubted bravery and military prowess, is ultimately a failure. Although nominally the hero of this poem, Jason would not have succeeded in his quest for the Golden Fleece without the intervention of Medea and the goddess Juno. He also allows himself to be manipulated by stronger male patriarchs, Pelias, Æetes and Creon, for example, and ultimately behaves in a disgraceful way when he rejects Medea in favour of Glauce. On this point, Silver argues that Jason's passion for Medea is symbolic of his noble deeds and therefore, 'when he rejects Medea for Glauce, he is repudiating the heroic way of life.'[139] After Medea kills their sons and Glauce, Jason contemplates suicide as he comes to realise the disastrous consequences of his behaviour:

> Ah what a shame, and what a weary load
> His life shall bear! His old love cast away,
> His new love dead upon that fearful day,
> Childless, dishonoured, must his days go by.[140]
> (ll.32-35)

Jason, however, takes the throne of Corinth and eventually regains his spirits:

> And 'midst all things, somewhat his misery
> Was dulled unto him, and as the days went by,
> And he began again to cast his eyes
> On lovely things, and hope began to rise
> Once more within his heart.[141]
> (ll.15-19)

[138] Kirchhoff, p. 147.
[139] Silver, p. 51.
[140] *C.W.* Vol II, p. 291.
[141] Ibid., p.292.

He dies alone, not heroically in battle however, but crushed by a beam from the rotting Argos . Jason is not a selfless hero like Hector, nor is he a symbol of social justice like Sigurd the Volsung.[142] Jason is undoubtedly brave, but he is also a flawed character. The motivation for the quest for the Golden Fleece is self-aggrandisement rather than altruism:

> But now did Jason's heart within him burn
> To show his deeds to other men than these.[143]
> (ll. 23-24)

Jason is egotistic and, as a consequence, is the very antithesis of a hero.

In keeping with the spirit of the piece, however, Morris emphasises the notion of fellowship in *Jason*. He devotes an entire book, some 540 lines, to the gathering together of the Argonauts, all of whom are 'neither poor of heart, nor weak of wit'.[144] In Morris's version, however, Jason is the undisputed leader. His speech to the Argonauts prior to setting out on their journey receives a tumultuous reception:

> So spake he, and so mighty was the shout,
> That the hall shook, and shepherd-folk without
> The well- walled city heard it, as they went
> Unto the fold across the thymy bent.[145]
> (ll. 18-21)

This differs from Apollonius's *Argonautica,* in which Jason was elected leader by his men but only after their original, unanimous choice, Hercules, had declined the position and, in turn, nominated Jason:

> Thus he spake; and the young heroes turned their eyes towards Hercules sitting in their midst, and with one shout they all enjoined upon him to be their leader; but he, from the place where he sat, stretched forth his right hand and said: 'Let no one offer this honour to me. For I will not consent, and I will forbid any other to stand up. Let the hero who brought us together, himself be the leader of the host.'[146]
> (ll. 341-347)

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[142] See Chapter Four of this thesis.
[143] *C.W.* Vol. II, p. 165.
[144] Ibid., p.38.
[145] Ibid., p.53.
[146] Rhodius Apollonius, *The Argonautica* trans. R.C. Seaton www.gutenberg.org Accessed 9/1/13.

The fact that, in Morris's version, Jason was not democratically elected, however, is not indicative of social inequality but, rather, owes much to the Romantic tradition. Romanticism, according to Ruth Kinna, is associated with a number of ideas: 'creative self-expression, the will to action, the rejection of universal rules of reason and *the celebration of leadership*.'[147] To be a head of a fraternity was not concomitant in Morris's mind with authoritarianism or tyranny: King Arthur was the leader of the Knights of the Round Table, Hector was the brave military commander of Troy and Morris himself was the *de facto* leader of his artistic 'Set'. Writing about the initial plans for *The Earthly Paradise,* Dunlap has stated that:

> The diversity of persons involved in the project was typical of the social nature of many of the enterprises of the Morris circle of those years, and so was the enjoyment the work gave to those who took part in it. Morris, of course, took the lead.[148]

It is true, however, that all the Argonauts have noble or divine ancestors: Erginus and Nauphlus were sons of Neptune, Clytius was a king and, of course, Jason was the son of a king. This notion of an aristocratic élite band is, it could be argued, antithetical to the perceived egalitarianism of the Romantics which greatly influenced Morris and his 'Set'. Morris was, however, still young and learning his craft and it is only natural that his poetry would be inspired by all his early influences. In addition, as a product of a rather insular, bourgeois upbringing Morris had had little direct contact with the working class. The egalitarianism of the Romantic and Neo-Romantic movements which influenced the Pre-Raphaelites was, in Morris's mind, confined to his educated peer group. Morris could only write about characters and themes that inspired him for the working classes were, at that time, largely beyond his sphere of knowledge. As Thompson has noted, even much later after his

[147] Ruth Kinna, *William Morris: The Art of Socialism* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p.11. italics mine.
[148] Dunlap, p.24.

political campaigning began, Morris 'rarely expresses any vitality in the working class, but only in the Cause itself, the hope of the future'.[149] This view is endorsed by Jack Mitchell who, writing about Morris's poem 'The Pilgrims of Hope' (1885-86), observed that 'beneath his very real socialist innovations and preoccupations Morris was unable entirely to free himself either from the traditional bourgeois aesthetic conventions with which he grew up, or from contemporary tendencies in the relationship of the bourgeois artist to late industrial-capitalist reality.'[150] In *Jason,* Morris does, however, use the heroic literature of the past to critique the present in that Jason is far from an ideal hero as he is self-serving rather than altruistic. In this respect, Jason epitomises the cult of the individual that was so prevalent in the nineteenth century.

(iii) The portrayal of women

As has been stated previously, in any reworking of a source it is the differences, rather than the similarities, that offer an insight into an author's views on his or her contemporary society. One such feature in *Jason* is Morris's propensity to concentrate on his female characters, as he had earlier with Guenevere in *Defence* and Helen in *Scenes.* It is Medea, not Jason, who is the most interesting character in this poem. Silver contends that Morris's main focus is the fated and fatal passion of Jason and Medea, but that 'his sympathies are clearly with the woman […] The romance springs to life only when she appears; hers are the joys and torments with which the poet empathises'.[151] May Morris endorses this view in her introduction to *The Life and Death of Jason*:

[149] Thompson, p. 775.
[150] Jack Mitchell, 'William Morris's Aesthetic Relationship to the Contemporary Working Class' *Zeitschrift fur Angilstik und Amerikanistik,* Vol 33 (1985), pp 153-160.
[151] Silver, p.51.

> I have always felt that my father's sympathies were with Medea – not Medea the sorceress, but the woman weak in the very strength of her love; that he found the hero himself rather second-rate and that he refused to sacrifice the reality of this feeling to any necessity of keeping "Jason" in the foreground of the picture.[152]

Medea *is* a sorceress, but Morris plays down her supernatural powers in his version. It is true that she uses a mysterious potion to aid Jason in the taming of the Brazen Bulls and the quelling the Earth-Born, but Morris underplays the magic by describing Medea's concoction as essentially herbal:[153]

> And kneeling by the fire, she cast therein
> Shreddings of many herbs, and setting it
> Amidst the flames, she watched them curl and flit
> About the edges of the blackening brass.[154]
> (ll. 11-14)

Morris describes in great detail Medea's trip to the woods to gather and infuse the herbs. [155] Medea's intervention is *natural* rather than preternatural. Morris evokes here the pre-industrial age when mediaeval craftsmen and women lived simply and close to nature. This was an era when nature provided resources which could be used by and were, indeed, vital to human beings. Morris's lengthy description of Medea's use of nature emphasises the contrast between the rural organic communities of the Middle Ages and nineteenth-century industrial conurbations.

In *Jason*, furthermore, Morris deviates from his sources in that it is nature and not the supernatural which ignites Medea's passion for Jason. They fall in love during their first meeting as a result of a natural, mutual desire:

> And when her eyes met his grey eyes, on fire
> With that which burned her, then with sweet new shame
> Her fair face reddened, and there went and came

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[152] *C.W.* Vol.II, p.xvj.

[153] From an early age, Morris had an extensive knowledge of plants and herbs acquired by both his own observation and by reading the illustrated work of the sixteenth-century botanist, John Gerard's *Herball or Generall Historie of Plantes* (1597).

[154] *C.W.*Vol.II, p.104.

[155] The description of Medea's visit to the woods is over 150 lines long.

Delicious tremors through her.[156]
(ll. 27-30)

In Apollonius's *Argonautica* and other previous versions of the myth, Medea's love for Jason is the result of being struck by an arrow from the bow of Eros:

> And the bolt burnt deep down in the maiden's heart like a flame;
> And ever she kept darting bright glances straight up at Aeson's son
> And within her breast her heart panted fast through anguish,
> All remembrance left her and her soul melted with sweet pain.[157]
> (ll. 284-287)

According to Morris, Medea's love for Jason is not a consequence of divine intervention but is, instead, a physical attraction. Morris, therefore, humanises Medea and she becomes a sympathetic character rather than the notorious, vengeful Colchian sorceress depicted in earlier versions. She is 'wise among the wise'[158] and as brave as any of the Argonauts. As an example of this, she goes alone to Iolchos to prepare the way for Jason to claim his throne:

> O well-beloved, amongst our foes I go
> Alone and weak, nor do I surely know
> If I shall live or die there;[159]
> (ll. 17-19)

Even though Medea is a murderess, Morris's portrayal of her provides mitigation for some of her actions and exoneration for others. When Medea and Jason escape with the Golden Fleece, for example, they are pursued by the Colchians who are led by Absyrtus, Medea's brother. According to Apollonius, Medea suggests to Jason that they set a trap for Absyrtus:

> And I will beguile Absyrtus to come into thy hands – do thou greet him with splendid gifts – if only I could persuade the heralds on their departure to bring him alone to hearken to my words. Thereupon, if this

[156] *C.W.* Vol. II, p.101.
[157] *Apollonius,* p. 51. www.guttenberg.org Accessed 13/01/13.
[158] *C.W.* Vol. II, p.108.
[159] Ibid., p.215.

> deed pleases thee, slay him and raise a conflict with the Colchians. I care not.[160]

In Morris's version, however, Medea is not implicated in her brother's death. Absyrtus is sent, instead, by his father to prevent Medea's 'abduction' and refuses Jason's request to allow them to sail away peacefully:

> That ye against all friendship and good laws
> Bear off my sister with you; wherefore now
> Mars give you courage and a brazen brow!
> That ye may try this dangerous pass in vain,
> For smoothly of your slaying am I fain.[161]
>
> (ll. 28-30)

In Morris's poem, Absyrtus is a casualty of war, not a victim of sibling treachery. He is also mourned by Medea:

> So passed this day, and she no less forgot
> That wreck upon the bar, the evil spot,
> Red with a brother's blood,[162]
>
> (ll.2-4)

The most significant amelioration of Medea's deeds is in Morris's treatment of her infamous crime of infanticide, however. Rejected by Jason in favour of Glauce, Medea murders her own children and then her rival. In *Jason,* Morris merely alludes to the killing of the boys as a past event, ascribing to Medea a benign motivation, that of sparing her offspring the pain of existence:

> An easy thing it had been then to die;
> For in the thought of immortality
> Do children play about the flowery meads,
> And win their heaven with a crown of weeds.[163]
>
> (ll. 33-36)

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[160] *Apollonius,* p.75 www.guttenberg.org Accessed 13/01/13. (ll. 416-9).
[161] *C.W.* Vol. II, p.136.
[162] Ibid.. p.137.
[163] Ibid., p.285.

Morris's description of children playing in 'flowery meads' throughout eternity is highly idealised especially when contrasted with, say, William Caxton's graphic description of Medea's act in his *History of Jason:*

> Whan the desolate lady has sayd these words she holdyng her yong childe whiche was moche tender, toke him by the two legges & by the force of her armes Rente him in two pieces & in that point cast him in the plater to fore Iason and Creusa.[164]
>
> (ll. 21-24)

In Morris's version, Medea does not spare *herself* from future grief but, like Guenevere in *Defence,* she lives a long life of penance that the reader of the poem is left to imagine:

> Yet she died not,
> But fleeing, somehow, from that fatal spot,
> She came to Athens, and there long did dwell,
> Whose after life I list not here to tell.[165]
>
> (ll. 5-8)

Morris's sympathetic treatment of Medea is all the more remarkable when juxtaposed with the idea of woman as a destructive force, which is explicit throughout *Jason.* There are the Lemnian women, for example, who, according to the one male survivor, murder all their menfolk, husbands *and* sons:

> But that there might be one to tell the thing,
> Nigh dawn I woke, and turning thought to cling
> Unto the warm side of my well-loved wife,
> But found nought there but a keen two-edged knife
> So, wondering much, I gat me from the bed,
> And going thence, found all the floor be-bled
> In my son's sleeping place, and high the door
> His body, hacked and hewn, upon the floor:[166]
>
> (ll. 13-19)

In the above passage the speaker describes the terrible results of his wife's frenzied attack on their child.[167] There are no mitigating circumstances: this was without a

[164] William Caxton, *The History of Jason* ed. John Munro (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd, 1913), p. 175.
[165] *C.W.* Vol. II, p.292.
[166] Ibid., p.61.

doubt a truly monstrous act. In Morris's version, unlike that of his sources, the Argonauts' purpose in visiting the women of Lemnos was not sexual. This is unsurprising as chastity was, of course, central to the chivalric code to which Morris and his 'Set' aspired. It may also have been partly due to an innate sense of delicacy on Morris's part. Morris never wrote explicitly about the physical consummation of heterosexual relationships, nor did he ever write of homosexual affairs.[168] It is noteworthy that he describes Hylas as the squire of Hercules, and not his lover as in the *Argonautica.* Many of Morris's readers would have been familiar with the legend of Jason and Medea, but any explicit reference to homosexuality would not have been acceptable to the Victorian reader. The contemporary re-telling of Greek legends was popular in the nineteenth century especially when the chivalric elements in Greek life and literature were emphasised. As Mark Girouard has stated, however:

> The catch to the Greeks of course, apart from their paganism, was their attitude to sex. But most Victorians of the period accepted and even admired Greek ideas of male friendship, as long as they did not go too far. Love between men or boys, and men and boys, was beautiful and praiseworthy; sex was disgusting.[169]

Jason is never portrayed as homosexual, but he is promiscuous. In the *Argonautica*, after a brief affair with Queen Hypsipyle,[170] Jason leaves her with the callous command that:

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[167] The fact that he is the sole survivor means, of course, that his account cannot be corroborated.

[168] There is no record of Morris acknowledging homosexuality although he must have been aware of its existence, at Marlborough, for example. There were certainly gay men amongst the wider Pre-Raphaelite set, Swinburne for instance.

[169] Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (London: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 170.

[170] According to Dante, Jason is confined to Hell because he is a serial seducer:

> There with his tokens and his ornate words
> Did he deceive Hypsipyle, the maid
> Who first herself had all the rest deceived.
> There did he leave her pregnant and forlorn
> And also for Medea is vengeance done.

Dante Alighieri, *Inferno* Canto XVIII trans. www.online-literature.com/dante Accessed 22/02/13.

> […] if thou shouldst bear a male child,
> Send him when grown to the Pelasgian Iolcus
> To heal the grief of my father and mother.[171]
> (ll. 903-905)

In Apollonius's version the actions of the women of Lemnos are motivated by revenge because of their men's infidelity. Conversely, Morris makes no attempt to mitigate the actions of the Lemnian women but, rather, he describes them as hysterical females who commit acts of blood-thirsty violence. In fact, he depicts their rampage in sexual terms: the women were either naked or had their kirtles 'looped up or rent'[172] which suggests that female sexuality is both potent and threatening:

> From house-wall unto house-wall, was now filled
> With frantic women, whose thin voices shrilled
> With unknown war-cries; little did they heed,
> If as they tore along, their flesh did bleed,
> So that some men were slain, nor feared they now
> If they were either smote with spear or bow,[173]
> (ll. 3-8)

Throughout *Jason,* Morris often appears to adhere to the binary notion of woman as either saint or sinner. There are the seductive, malevolent females of earlier versions of the myth: the infamous Harpes who simultaneously tempt and torture Phineus, and the Mysian water nymphs who, consumed with lust, lead the 'fair-limbed'[174] Hylas to his death, for example. The depiction of Woman as temptress, predatory and deadly is, however, juxtaposed with Morris's sympathetic

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[171] *Argonautica,*
p.20. www.guttenberg.org Accessed 13/01/13.
[172] *C.W.* Vol. II, p.62.
[173] Ibid., p.62.
These lines are reminiscent of the witches in Robert Burns' poem, *Tam O'Shanter* (1791), all of whom:

> 'coost her duddies to the wark
> And linkit at it in her sark.'

The People's Edition of the Poetical Works of Robert Burns ed. W. Scott Douglas (Edinburgh: John Menzies & Co, 1913), p. 134.
[174] *C.W.* Vol. II, p.64.

representation of Medea. Despite her supernatural powers, Medea is portrayed by Morris as a woman who sacrificed everything for her lover. As Jason himself states:

> For me she gave up country, kin and name,
> For me she risked tormenting and the flame,
> The anger of the Gods and curse of man;[175] (ll.6-9)

Medea, furthermore, has a psychological depth which is not present in the other characters. Morris's description of her gradual realisation of Jason's infidelity is remarkably realistic. At first, Medea notices changes in Jason's behaviour towards her, despite his subterfuge:

> Nor to these matters was the Colchian blind
> And though as yet his speech to her was kind,
> Good heed she took of all his moody ways,
> And how he loved her not as in past days;[176]
> (ll. 6-9)

This is followed by a period of denial by Medea:

> Long time she tried to shut her eyes to this,
> Striving to save that fair abode of bliss;[177]
> (ll. 14-15)

She finally accepts that Jason is about to abandon her:

> So, on a weary, hopeless day, she said:
> "Ah, poor Medea, art thou then betrayed
> By that thou trusted?[178]
> (ll. 22-24)

This period of acceptance is followed by a terrible anger during which she exacts her revenge and, finally, becomes 'wrapped in uttermost despair.'[179] These stages of denial, acceptance, anger and despair are consistent with current psychological

[175] Ibid., p.263.
[176] Ibid., p.271.
[177] Ibid., p.271.
[178] Ibid., p.271.
[179] Ibid., p.280.

research on the process of grief or loss.[180] Far from being the cruel and monstrous woman of earlier versions, Medea is compassionate and humane and is only driven to commit infanticide and murder by the actions of Jason. Indeed, Medea even empathises with her rival and declares that by killing her, she is saving Glauce from the pain of her inevitable rejection by Jason:

> O woman whose young beauty has so cursed
> My hapless life, at least I save thee this –
> The slow descent to misery from bliss,
> With bitter torment growing day by day,
> And faint hope lessening till it fades away
> Into dull waiting for the certain blow.[181]
> (ll. 4-9)

Morris portrays Medea as a woman in close harmony with the natural world and this has a critical resonance in eco-social or, more specifically, eco-feminist theory. As Rigby has argued, because of their close symbolic relationship to nature, women 'have been cast either as "primitive" and potentially "monstrous" hence part of that nature that was to be mastered by rational man, or as an alluring embodiment of that nature to which rational man simultaneously longs to return.'[182] Interestingly, this dichotomy is evident in Morris's poem. Jason happily makes use of Medea's talents (her knowledge of herbs, her wisdom, her bravery and her supernatural gifts) for his own gains. When Jason no longer has any use for her, however, he refers to Medea as a 'dreadful sorceress'.[183] Jason's mistreatment of Medea is analogous to the exploitation of both women and nature in the contemporary industrial patriarchal society.

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[180] See, for example, John Archer, *The Nature of Grief: the evolution and psychology of reactions to grief* (London: Routledge, 1999).
[181] *C.W.* Vol. II, p. 284
[182] Rigby, p. 162.
[183] *C.W*. Vol. II, p. 279.

(iv) The importance of rewarding work

As stated previously, most of the named characters in *Jason* are either aristocratic or divine and, at first sight, would not be associated with labour. Many of the gods were, however, famous for their skills. Vulcan, the god of fire, was a great blacksmith, for example. The Argonauts are all noble but, significantly, they are all expert in some craft as well. From Argus, the 'well-skilled'[184] ship-wright and Tiphys the pilot, to the female warrior, Atalanta, and the bard, Orpheus, they all work together to build the Argo and prepare for the quest for the Golden Fleece. Morris here evokes the idea of a happy community where all members derive pleasure from their employment. The product of their collaboration is the Argo, which Jason describes in glowing terms:

> "And now behold within the haven rides
> Our good ship, swinging in the changing tides,
> Gleaming with gold and blue and cinnabar
> The long new oars beside the rowlocks are,
> The sail hangs flapping in the light west wind,
> Nor ought undone can any craftsman find
> From stem to stern;[185]
>
> (ll. 6-12)

The 'gleaming' ship is clearly an extremely well-constructed vessel, as the phrase 'nor ought undone can any craftsman find' suggests. Everyone can take pleasure in their finished product. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in the nineteenth century where factory workers derived no pleasure from the monotonous work they

[184] *C.W.* Vol. II, p.39.
[185] Ibid., p. 53.

had to perform. In 'Useful Work versus Useless Toil' (1884), for example, Morris stated that:

> Our epoch has invented machines which would have appeared wild dreams to the men of past ages, and of those machines we have yet *made no use.* They are called 'labour saving' machines – a commonly used phrase which implies what we expect of them; but we do not get what we expect.[186]

Morris was not opposed to machinery *per se.* He maintained, however, that the use of machines should be confined to those tasks which were both unpleasant and essential: the removal of sewage from urban areas, for instance. In 'How We Live and How We Might Live' (1885), Morris states that in principle, he is not against 'machinery being used freely for releasing people from the more mechanical and repulsive part of necessary labour.'[187] In this respect Morris practised what he preached for, at his Merton Abbey works, he did use some machines in order to reduce the dull and monotonous tasks that the weavers had to do. Indeed, conditions at Merton were good for the workers, many of them women who operated the hand-looms. The following description of the weaving shed at Merton appeared in *The Spectator* in 1883:

> The room is full of sunlight and colour. The upright frames face you at right angles, with a long row of windows looking close upon the bright shining river[…] The strong, level afternoon light shines round the figures of the young girls seat in rows on low benches along the frames, and brightens to gold of the fair heads. Above and behind them rows of bobbins of many coloured worsteds, stuck on pegs, shower down threads of beautiful colours, which are caught by the deft fingers, passed through strong threads (fixed uprightly in the frames, to serve as a foundation), tied in a knot, slipped down in their place, snipped even with the rest of the carpet, all in a second of time, by the little maidens.[188]

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[186] *C.W.* Vol. XXIII, p.117
[187] Ibid., p. 24
[188] 'On the wandle', *The Spectator,* 23rd November 1883. Quoted in MacCarthy, p.433.

The above report of skilled craftswomen creating colourful tapestries with their 'deft fingers' in a bright well-lit room is an idyllic one and is reminiscent of Morris's description in *Jason* of Pelias's daughters happily weaving:

> White-armed Alcestis sat before the loom,
> Casting the shuttle swift from hand to hand.
> The while Eradne's part it was to stand
> Amongst the maids who carded out the wool
> And filled the gleaming ivory shuttles full.
> Amphinome, meantime, her golden head
> Bent o'er the spinners of the milk-white thread,
> And by the growing web still set aside
> The many-coloured bundles newly dyed,
> Blood-red, and heavenly blue, and grassy green,[189]
> (ll. 15-24)

The above lines portray three young women who, despite their aristocratic lineage, derive pleasure from work. The weaving is clearly a collaborative effort and the use of phrases like 'milk-white thread', 'blood red', 'heavenly blue' and 'grassy green' to describe the colours suggest that the fabrics used are natural rather than synthetic. Like Morris's future employees, the princesses are engaged in rewarding work in pleasant surroundings. Morris believed that everyone was entitled to work that exercised their physical, intellectual and emotional faculties. It was not until the 1870s, however, that Morris began explicitly to articulate this idea, though his beliefs can be discerned in *Jason.*

(v) The importance of nature and the environment

Morris had a lifelong attachment to, and appreciation of, nature and this is reflected in all his poetry and prose, including *Jason.* Early on in the poem Morris emphasises the idyllic quality of Jason's childhood. He was educated by Chiron and lived in harmony with the natural world:

[189] *C.W.* Vol. II, p.222.

> Now was his dwelling-place a fair-hewn cave
> Facing the south; thereto the herdsmen drave
> Full oft to Chiron woolly sheep, and neat,
> And brought him wine and garden-honey sweet,
> And fruits that flourish well in the fat plain,
> And cloth and linen, and would take again
> Skins of slain beasts.[190]
>
> (ll. 29-35)

The above lines describe a utopian existence. Jason lives in a southern facing (hence, presumably warm and dry) cave and the references to 'herdsmen' and 'neat' 'woolly sheep' evoke a pastoral idyll. It is a land of plenty: the earth is fertile ('fat') and there is an abundance of 'sweet' food. Nature does not only, however, provide the basic human necessities; food, clothing and shelter. Morris describes later in the poem the restorative effect that the beauty of an unspoilt landscape has on the weary Argonauts:

> On the green earth they clean forgot their pain,
> For joy to feel the sweet soft grass again,
> And see fair things of the world, and feel
> The joyous sunlight that the sick can heal,
> And soft tormenting of the western wind.[191]
>
> (ll. 27-31)

Morris also narrates, at great length, the Argonauts' encounter with the Sirens whose deadly melodies tempt all passing seafarers. Significantly, in Morris's version the Argonauts escape the clutches of the sea-witches not by plugging their ears but, rather, by the song of Orpheus, the bard. It is Orpheus's evocation of nature in the form of an ode to the seasons that he sings to counter the seductive verses of the Sirens, that saves the Argonauts.

Earlier in the poem, furthermore. it is nature (in the form of Medea's use of herbs) that defeats the Brazen Bulls which Morris describes as monstrous:

> Ugly and rugged was that spot of ground ,

[190] *C.W.* Vol. II, p.8.
[191] Ibid., p.157.

> And with an iron wall was closed around ,
> And at the further end a monstrous cage
> Of iron bars, shut in the stupid rage
> Of those two beasts, and therein ever came
> The flashing and the scent of sulphurous flame,
> As with their brazen clangorous bellowing
> They hailed the coming of the Colchian king;[192]
>
> (ll. 29-36)

The use of phrases like 'sulphurous flame' and 'clangorous bellowing' which are reminiscent of the cacophony of Hell depicted in Dante's fourteenth-century poem, *Inferno,* (a favourite of Morris and his mentor, Rossetti) are also evocative of a factory full of malodorous, noisy machines discharging polluting smoke. The Bulls are used by Æetes, the Colchian king, in order to sustain his power and wealth, which are symbolized by the Golden Fleece. This is analogous to the Victorian factory owner's desire for profits, irrespective of the destruction to the environment. The battle between Medea's potion and the Bulls is a paradigm for the conflict between nature and industrial capitalism which Morris was to articulate and campaign against later in life. He argued that:

> [it is] allowing the machine to be our masters and not our servants that so injures the beauty of life nowadays. In other words, it is the token of the terrible crime we have fallen into of using our control of the power of Nature for the purpose of enslaving people, we, careless, meantime of how much happiness we rob their lives of.[193]

As we know, Morris was always firmly opposed to capitalism and, as Macdonald has argued, '[his] critique of capitalism, not to mention his ideal of socialism, were always intimately *ecological.'*[194] Morris believed that capitalism was not only destroying the lives of human beings, it was destroying the environment as well.

(vi) The folly of materialism

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[192] Ibid., p.113.
[193] *C.W.* Vol. XXIII, p.24.
[194] Macdonald, p. 155.

Throughout *Jason* there are many references to human greed (symbolised by the Golden Fleece) and its tragic consequences. Phryxus, the Theban prince who fled to Colchis on the golden ram, is, despite his loyal service to King Æetes, cruelly murdered:

> Within his pillared house, upon the wall
> Hung a gold Fleece; until it did befall
> That in Æetes' heart a longing grew
> To have the treasure, even if he slew
> His guest to get it: so one evil night,
> While the prince lay and dreamed about the fight,
> With all-armed men was every entry filled,
> And quickly were the few doorkeepers killed;
> And Phryxus, roused with clamour from his bed,
> Half-armed and dizzy, with few strokes was dead.[195](ll.15-24)

In these lines Morris evokes the treachery of Æetes's actions. Phryxus was his guest and, as a consequence, should not have been harmed. The king's desire for the fleece (riches) is so great that he has his men kill Phryxus whilst he sleeps so that he had no chance to defend himself. Æetes's actions are entirely dishonourable: he does not even commit the act himself but rather has his men do the deed.

It is Pelias who narrates the tale of how the golden fleece came into the possession of Æetes and, ironically, he too is possessed with the desire for material wealth:

> With that they came unto the royal house
> Where Pelias dwelt, grown old and timorous,
> Oppressed with blood of those that he had slain,
> Desiring wealth and longer life in vain.[196]
> (ll. 5-8)

Pelias's craving for riches has destroyed not only the lives of others but, ultimately, his own as well. There is an obvious parallel between the actions of Æetes and

[195] *C.W.* Vol. II, p. 34.
[196] Ibid., p. 221.

Pelias and those of Victorian industrialists who, Morris believed, exploited other people and the environment in order to acquire more wealth. In this respect, Jason also resembles nineteenth-century *entrepreneurs.* Throughout the poem, he is never satisfied with what he has. He constantly seeks more and exploits others, particularly women, in order to achieve his ends. One of the defeated Harpes puts this succinctly when she says to Jason:

> Fare ye well, Jason, still unsatisfied,
> Still seeking for a better thing than best,
> A fairer thing than fairest, without rest; [197]
> (ll 28-30)

(IV) Conclusion

Morris asserted in 1888 that, 'it is impossible to exclude socio-political questions from the consideration of aesthetics',[198] a view which many modern critics would endorse. Raymond Williams, for example, stated that 'an essential hypothesis in the development of the idea of culture is that art of a period is closely and necessarily related to the generally prevalent "way of life" , and further that, in consequence , aesthetic, moral and social judgements are closely interrelated.'[199] Morris was both criticised and praised for the perceived escapism of *The Life and Death of Jason*. In *Jason* and *Scenes,* however, Morris employs the beauty of nature *in resistance to* rather than as a compensation for industrial exploitation. The central theme of both poems is the psychological struggle of the protagonists, many of whom suffer from soul-destroying doubt. In addition, embedded in these poems written between 1859 and 1867, *before* Morris began publically to criticise the

[197] *C.W.* Vol. II, p.82.
[198] *C.W.* Vol XII, p.323.
[199] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), p. 130.

contemporary socio-political *status quo*, are expressions of Morris's love of nature, chivalric values, such as fraternity and honour, and an empathy for women. There is also a sense of Morris's deep unease about the nature of a capitalist society which, as he was later to argue, engendered desires in industrialists and *entrepreneurs* which were linked to the profit imperative and which, inevitably, lead to the exploitation of other people as well as of the environment. As Morris stated in an article entitled 'The Dull Level of Life' published in the socialist journal *Justice* in 1884:

> To use the forces of nature by means of universal co-operation for the purpose of gaining generous and equal livelihood for all, leaving them free to enjoy their lives, and to emulate each other in producing for themselves and others is what Socialism aims at.[200]

Morris believed that everyone, irrespective of class or gender, was entitled to benefit from the emotional and physical sustenance that nature afforded and that no individual should be exploited. And though Morris did not publically articulate these ideas until the 1880s, his eco-social beliefs can be seen in embryonic form in *Scenes from the Fall of Troy* and *The Life and Death of Jason.*

[200] William Morris, *Political Writings: Contributions to Justice and Commonweal 1883-1890,* ed. Nicolas Salmon (Bristol: Theommes Press, 1994), pp.30-1.

Chapter Three
The Earthly Paradise: A Poem (1868-1870)

(I) Introduction

Originally published in three volumes[1] in 1868, 1869 and 1870 *The Earthly Paradise,* like *The Life and Death of Jason* (1867), was critically acclaimed and earned Morris a reputation as, according to G.W. Cox, a poet of 'consummate art and skill'.[2] Ironically, this success came during the most unhappy period of his life. Although 'The Firm' was prospering, Morris was becoming increasingly disillusioned by what he perceived to be the vulgar consumerism of some of his predominately wealthy, middle class clientele; he referred to them as 'the swinish rich'.[3] At that time, furthermore, Jane's affair with Rossetti was at its height and Morris's personal life was further complicated by his own deep attachment to Georgiana (Georgie) Burne-Jones, the wife of his close friend, Edward Burne-Jones who was, by then, also having an extra marital affair with his muse, Maria Zambaco.[4] Georgie and Morris sought solace in one another's company, drawn together as they were by a mutual sense of loss and betrayal. There is no evidence that the relationship between Morris and Georgie was in any way adulterous, however, and it is most likely that loyalty to Burne-Jones would have precluded Morris's acting on any

[1] By the time the final volume was published in December 1870, the first volume had been divided into two so that the complete poem comprises four volumes.

[2] G.W.Cox, unsigned review, *Edinburgh Review* January 1871, cxxxiii 243 www.morrisedition.lib.uiowa.edu Accessed 09/03/13.

[3] Peter Faulkner, *Against the Age: An Introduction to William Morris* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980), p.75.

[4] Maria Zambaco was the daughter of wealthy Greeks Demetrius and Euphrosyne Cassavetti. Following the breakdown of her marriage to the Parisian doctor Demetrius Zambaco, in 1866, she returned to London and re-joined Graeco-artistic circles. She was considered extremely beautiful and, according to her cousin, Alexander Ionides, 'had a large heart and several *affaires de coeur.'* Burne-Jones's attraction to her bears an interesting parallel to Jane's attraction to Rossetti as Maria was also his muse. In this role she was very successful as, after a visit to Burne-Jones's studio in July 1869, Rossetti wrote to Jane Morris, 'I was particularly struck with a most beautiful single figure in profile with some smaller figures by a door in the background. This I thought one of the finest things he had done'. (MacCarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite,* p.207).

impulses he may have had. Nevertheless, in 1870 he gave Georgie a gift of a hand-written and beautifully illustrated book of his poems. Some of these poems appear to be very personal, expressing as they do a deep sadness for love that is lost or unfulfilled. It would be difficult to be unmoved by the poignant, final verse of 'Hope Dieth Love Liveth', for example*:*

> Behold with lack of happiness
> The Master, Love our hearts did bless
> Lest we should think of him the less –
> Love dieth not, though hope is dead![5]
>
> (ll. 6-9)

Given his troubled personal life, it is not surprising, therefore, that the transience of love, a popular theme in mediaeval literature, pervades *The Earthly Paradise,* a collection of twenty-four verse narratives related by two groups of storytellers. The epic poem,[6] which is set in the fourteenth century, relates the story of a group of men ('The Wanderers') who have fled the Black Death in search of a refuge. What they find is an earthly paradise. After many heroic exploits they are shipwrecked on an island in the Adriatic sea and are offered sanctuary there by the elders or 'city-fathers' who are descended from the ancient Greeks. The two groups agree to recite tales to one another handed down from their ancestors from a time when, as the chief priest, says:

> […] men might cross a kingdom in a day,
> And kings remembered they should one day die,
> And all folk dwelt in great simplicity[7]
>
> (ll. 28-30)

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[5] William Morris, *A Book of Verse* edited by Roy Strong & Joyce Whalley (London: Scholar Press, 1980), p 25.

[6] Herbert Tucker describes *The Earthly Paradise* as one of the four great epic publications of 1868. The others were Tennyson's *Holy Grail* volume, George Eliot's *The Spanish Gypsy* and Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book. Epic: Britain's Heroic Muse 1790-1910.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 391. Peter Faulkner, however, does not consider *The Earthly Paradise* to be an epic. (E-mail to author of this thesis 27/03/2014)

[7] *C.W.* Vol. III*,* p.84.

The Elders' twelve narratives derive from classical tales, whereas the Wanderers' stories are drawn from the folklore and travel narratives of mediaeval England, France, northern Europe and Persia. In addition, the tales are identified with the months of the year. At the request of the City Elders, one of the Wanderers (Rolf) recounts the story of their journey. His tale is retold by the narrator in the 'Prologue' that furnishes the framework for the poem's twenty-four tales. In his 'thesaurus of narrative song'[8], Morris retells famous Greek and Oriental legends as well as stories from the *Gesta Romanorum,* and the Nordic *Nibelungen-Lied* and *Eddas.* Far from being merely a disparate collection of entertaining stories, *The Earthly Paradise* actually has a rather complex structure. Each pair of tales is framed by an introduction and a response to the other group's story. The entire poem is framed by the words of a narrator, ironically entitled the 'idle singer', who recites the opening 'Apology', the 'Prologue', the 'Epilogue' and 'L'Envoi'.

The Earthly Paradise was well-received by Morris's contemporary audience, perhaps, as Peter Faulkner has argued, because its division into a number of separate stories made 'it easier to assimilate'.[9] Erudite readers, however, such as George Eliot and her partner, G.H. Lewes, also appreciated the poem, as this1868 letter to John Blackwood reveals:

> We take Morris's poem into the woods with us and read it aloud, greedily, looking to see how much *more* there is in store for us. *If ever,* you have an idle afternoon, bestow it on the *Earthly Paradise.*[10]

Morris's evocation of the beauty of nature had universal appeal. It is significant that Eliot enjoyed reading the poem outdoors, although her suggestion that it was the perfect reading for an 'idle' afternoon implies a lack of gravitas in the work. This

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[8] Adams, O.F. & Rolfe, W.J. eds., *Atalanta's Race and Other Tales from The Earthly Paradise* (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1888), p.18.
[9] *The Critical Heritage*, p.10.
[10] Gordon S. Haight, ed., *The George Eliot Letters* Vol. IV (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 451.

attitude is supported by the following extract from a review of *The Earthly Paradise* by Alfred Austin:

> [W]hen we light the lamp and draw the curtains after a hard day's work on some autumn evening, comes the turn of the poet who is willing and able to amuse us. It is then that we seek for verse which can soothe the wearied mind with images of beauty, which can be enjoyed without effort, and which condescends to be entertaining.[11]

The belief that *The Earthly Paradise* was diverting, rather than didactic, led to the perception that it was a perfect antidote to the problems of the times. As E.C. Stedman states, 'Morris fairly escapes from our turmoil and materialism by this flight to the refuge of amusement of simple art.'[12] Indeed, Stedman's phase 'turmoil and materialism' summarises succinctly the 'problems' faced by the Victorians. Although the 1860s was a decade of relative peace for Britain,[13] increasing industrialisation was causing societal unease. Britain was by then one of the richest countries in the world, but the prosperity of the wealthy was troubling when juxtaposed with the position of many who appeared to live in 'something like immemorial poverty'. [14] This is evident in the following extract from an essay by Richard Monckton Milnes, which was published in *Essays on Reform* (1866):

> The real danger to England now is […] from the isolation of classes, caused by the extinction of the yeomanry and growth of a manufacturing population, and from the alarming increase in the political, and still more in the social, power of wealth.[15]

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[11] *Blackwood's* July 1869, p.73.
[12] E.C. Stedman, *Victorian Poets* (Boston: Houghton and Osgood, 1875), p.375.
[13] The Crimean War (1853-56) and the Indian Mutiny (1857-59) were over.
[14] Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain 1851-1875* (London: Fontana Press, 1988), p. 21.
[15] Asa Briggs, *Victorian People: A Reassessment of Persons and Themes 1851-67* (London: Penguin Books, 1955), p.261. Richard Monckton Milnes (1809-1885) was a contemporary of Tennyson and a member of the Cambridge literary set known as the Apostles Club. He became Baron Houghton in 1863.

This was not the prevailing attitude, however. Many Victorians had what Robin Gilmour has described as, 'a kind of cultural schizophrenic'[16] response to the burgeoning industrialisation and ensuing urbanisation. On the one hand, it *was* progress: not only was industrialisation a product of pioneering technology and the expertise of British manufacturers and *entrepreneurs,* it also created employment for the poor. This more positive view of the times was promulgated by many, including Sharon Turner who, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, said that 'they [industrialists] are not only fountains of that commerce which rewards us with the wealth of the world, but they are perpetually supplying the other classes and professions with new means of improvement and comfort.'[17]

On the other hand, there were moral and humanitarian concerns raised about the resultant waste, social injustice and destruction of the environment. This causal relationship is best illustrated by two paintings of the time. William Bell Scott's *Iron and Coal* (1855-60)[18] depicts healthy, muscular workmen in a successful Tyneside forge. The painting is a celebration of contemporary engineering achievements: while the men work on a wheel for a locomotive, in the background is an image of a train crossing Robert Stephenson's newly constructed High Level bridge. The message is clear: the massive expansion of industrialisation is 'good' for society as it provides productive employment through which men thrive.

Conversely, Henry Wallis's *The Stonebreaker* (1857)[19] portrays a labourer collapsed in a rural landscape. The subject is an agricultural worker but, through the increased mechanisation of farming, he has lost his job, and possibly his tied

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[16] Robin Gilmour, *The Victorian Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature 1830-1890* (London: Longman, 1993), p.207.

[17] Sharon Turner, *History of the Anglo-Saxons (1799-1805)* Book VII Chap IX p.231. www.dbooks.bodleian.ox.ac.uk. Turner was a well-known mediaevalist but, interestingly, did not share Morris's negative opinion of the industrial age.

[18] See Appendix III figure 14.

[19] See Appendix III figure 15.

cottage, and is now a stone breaker. Exhausted by the physical demands of the labour, he lies dying. Critical responses to this painting, originally exhibited [20] with a quotation from Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833-4), were contradictory. The *Daily News* described the figure as, 'the model peasant victim of social mistakes'.[21] Others found the painting's subject provocative. *The Times* complained that it was an unrealistic scene at a time when more had been done to assist the poor than at any period in British history.[22] The paradoxical belief that industrialisation was a force of both good and evil was problematic to many Victorians. It is unsurprising, therefore, that many responded to poetry that invoked the simpler world of their ancestors, one devoid of the 'filthy hells, the manufacturing districts',[23] a phrase later coined by Morris in his essay 'Art and the People' (1877).

Added to concerns about the social inequalities and suffering caused by industrialisation was an emerging environmental awareness among many social reformers. The problems of pollution caused by ever-increasing urbanisation and industrialisation, for example, led to the Thames Conservancy Act (1857) and a programme of improvements to the sewers in London in the following decade.[24] In order to preserve green, open spaces for the public, especially the poor whose living

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[20] *The Stone Breaker* was first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1858 without a title but with the opening lines of Tennyson's poem, 'A Dirge' (1830) inscribed on the frame: 'Now is done thy long day's work'. A quotation from Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* appeared in the exhibition catalogue:

> Hardly-entreated Brother! For us thy back was so bent, for us were thy straight limbs and fingers so deformed: thou wert our Conscript, on whom the lot fell, and fighting our battles wert so marred. For in thee too lay a god-created Form, but it was not to be unfolded: encrusted must it stand with the thick adhesions and defacements of labour; and thy body, like thy soul was not to know freedom.

[21] Tim Barringer, Jason Rosenfield & Alison Smith, *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde* (London: Tate Publishing, 2012), p.142.

[22] *The Times, 22*nd May 1858, p.9.

[23] May Morris, Vol. II, p. 401.

[24] Following the link made by Dr Jon Snow in 1854 between the source of the cholera epidemics of the 1840s and 1850s and London's polluted water supply, the engineer, Joseph Bazelgette was engaged to direct the construction of a sanitation system that would divert urban waste from the Thames.

conditions were cramped and unhealthy,[25] the Commons Preservation Society[26] was founded in 1865. In a time of relentless change, Morris's fresh retelling of old, familiar tales was extremely popular. As F.R. Leavis has stated, 'the nineteenth century […] was characteristically preoccupied with the creation of a dream world'[27] and *The Earthly Paradise* seemed to offer the reader an alternative to a troubling reality.

As we have seen, Morris's depiction of an earlier Golden Age has led to the accusation that *The Earthly Paradise* is escapist and lacking in social and ethical relevance. As Carole Silver has stated, '[*The Earthly Paradise*] has been attacked for representing an escapist tendency in Morris, who unable to confront either his marital crisis or the problems of his era, turned his back on the world and retreated into a simplistic retelling of worn-out legends.'[28] Ironically, it was this perceived escapism that made the poem very popular in Morris's time, as has already been noted. The following extract from an anonymous review of 1870 in *The Spectator* illustrates a typical response to *The Earthly Paradise*:

> Whither shall a reader turn in these days who longs to escape for a while from all the toil and clamour and strife of the world, and to roam at will in pleasant places, where nothing shall remind him of the doubtful battle-field where after a short breathing-space he must again bear his part?[…] It is Mr Morris's happy and peculiar faculty to cast utterly aside the complex questionings that vex our modern poetry. He carries us away to the days when men lived their life without overmuch thinking about it; he hardly

[25] Henry James described his first impressions of London in 1868 thus:
the miles of house-tops and viaducts, the complication of junctions and signals through which the train made its way to the station had already given me the scale. The weather had turned wet[….]The low black houses were as inanimate as so many rows of coal-scuttles, save where at frequent corners, from a gin-shop, there was a flare of light more brutal still than darkness. *English Hours* (1888),pp.3-4.
https://archive.org/details/englishhours Accessed 04/03/2014.

[26] The Commons Preservation Society was founded in 1865 by Lord Eversley. Its first committee members included Sir Robert Hunter, later co- founder of The National Trust, and Octavia Hill, the social reformer who worked to improve the housing conditions of the poor in London.

[27] F.R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry: a study of the contemporary situation* (New York: AMS Press, 1978), p. 10.

[28] Carole Silver, "*The Earthly Paradise*: Lost". *Victorian Poetry,* 13.3/4 (1975 Autumn/Winter), pp. 27-42.

> ever touches on matters of speculation, and when he does so, it is with a very light hand.[29]

Very few contemporary critics appreciated the irony in Morris's claim to be an 'idle singer'. Within two decades of the publication of *The Earthly Paradise*, however, Adams and Rolfe alluded to this paradox:

> The author of *The Earthly Paradise* had called himself 'the idle singer of an empty day' and had disclaimed, in terms which have been much misunderstood, the task of dealing with contemporary concerns.[30]

The perception of *The Earthly Paradise* as escapist is, in fact, a misreading of the poem. As Florence Boos has argued, 'it was *not* an escapist work, but one of the major achievements of Morris's life […] and an attempt to find historical meaning in the literature of grief, shared memory, and renewal.'[31] Far from being a repudiation of the efficacy of poetry, the 'Apology' is consciously ironic,[32] as it reveals many of Morris's concerns about his own society and the environment:

> So with this Earthly Paradise it is,
> *If ye will read it aright,* and pardon me,
> Who strive to build a shadowy isle of bliss
> Midmost the beating of the steely sea,
> Where tossed about all hearts of men must be;
> Whose ravening monsters mighty men shall slay,
> Not the poor singer of an empty day
> (ll. 36-42)[33] *italics mine*

Over a decade earlier, Morris had stated in a letter to his friend Cormell Price that the 'most beautiful poetry, and indeed almost all beautiful writing makes one feel sad, or indignant'.[34] In this, the final verse of the 'Apology', Morris challenges his audience to read his poem 'aright' and to be outraged by contemporary social and

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[29] *The Critical Heritage,* p.112.
[30] Adams & Rolfe, p.12.
[31] Florence Boos, *The Design of William Morris* (Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), p. 5.
[32] Florence Boos, "Victorian response to *Earthly Paradise* tales" *J.W.M.S.* Vol. 5.4 (Winter 1983-84), pp.16-29.
[33] *C.W.* Vol III, p.2.
[34] *Letters,* Vol. I, p.9.

environmental problems. An isle of bliss is unattainable or 'shadowy' whilst the 'steely sea'[35] of industrialisation and the 'ravening monsters' of capitalism exist.

(II) Sources and influences

As has been previously stated many critics also responded favourably to *The Earthly Paradise.* Morris was applauded for his clarity and his similarity to Chaucer:

> […] how worthy he proves himself of his master's Chaucer's mantle, and how good is his claim to be a reviver of a style of poetry as well adapted to the taste of our generation as the mass of the moralistic, disquisitional, and subjective poetry of our day […] there is a fairer chance for poetry to be read and appreciated and taken back into favour by a busy material age, if its scope is distinct and direct, its style clear and pellucid, and its manner something like that of the old rhapsodists, minnesinger, and tale-tellers who in divers climes and ages have won such deserved popularity.[36]

Morris would certainly have been pleased by this comparison with Chaucer,[37] although it could be argued that, in structure, *The Earthly Paradise* is more similar to Boccaccio's *Decameron*[38] than *The Canterbury Tales.* Morris's 'Apology', for instance, is analogous with Boccaccio's 'Proem' to *The Decameron* both in its function as an introduction and, significantly, in tone. Boccaccio's narrator, resigned to living a life without love, declares that:

> True enough, what I am to provide may be (and surely is) only the tiniest crumb of comfort to those in distress; none the less I feel it should be offered where the need appears the greatest, because that way it will be all the more useful and will prove all the more welcome.[39]

The pathos of Boccaccio's 'Proem' is echoed throughout Morris's 'Apology':

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[35] In the Old English *Elegies,* the sea represents a voyage or pilgrimage and is often a place of suffering in sharp contrast to the delights of the communal hall.

[36] *Saturday Review* 30th May 1868, p. 730.

[37] Morris was, of course, a great admirer of Chaucer. He refers to him in 'L'Envoi' as 'My Master, Geoffrey Chaucer'. *C.W.* Vol.VI. p.331.

[38] Morris was first introduced to Boccaccio's *Decameron* by Rossetti who, according to Morris, had 'no sympathy with Northern things, being an Italian by race' and was, when he first met him, 'immersed in Dante and the like'. *The Decameron* appears on Morris' list of One Hundred Best Books which he compiled in 1886, classified as a 'Mediaeval Story Book'. *Letters,* Vol. III, p.516.

[39] Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron* ed. J. Usher *(*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.4.

> Dreamer of dreams, born out of my due time,
> Why should I strive to set the crooked straight?
> Let it suffice me that my murmuring rhyme
> Beats with light wing against the ivory gate,
> Telling a tale not too importunate
> To those who in the sleepy region stay,
> Lulled by the singer of an empty day.[40]
> (ll. 22-28)

Ironically, Morris seems to be arguing that his own poetry is insubstantial:

> Of Heaven or Hell I have no power to sing,
> I cannot ease the burdens of your fears,
> Or make quick-coming death a little thing,
> Or bring again the pleasure of past years,
> Nor for my words shall ye forget your fears,
> Or hope again for aught that I can say,
> The idle singer of an empty day.[41]
> (ll. 1-7)

The first line suggests that Morris feels that, unlike poets such as Milton[42] and Dante, he is not worthy of writing about epic subjects like Heaven and Hell. On the other hand, Morris, like Boccaccio, is perhaps being a little disingenuous and employing the humility *topos*, a literary device also used by Chaucer, for example, in *The General Prologue* to *The Canterbury Tales.* This theory is supported by the following excerpt from Morris's letter to Swinburne in December 1869:

> I am delighted to have pleased you with Gudrun. For the rest I am rather painfully conscious myself that the book would have done me more credit if there had been nothing in it but the Gudrun, though I don't think the others quite the worst things I have done. Yet they are all too long and flabby, damn it![…] Acontius I know is a spoony, nothing less, and the worst of it is that if I did him over a dozen times I know I should make him just the same. I am hard at work now [on the *Egils Saga*], but I know I am making blunder on blunder, and if I could find anything else that really

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[40] *C.W.* Vol III, p.1.

[41] Ibid., p.1.

[42] In the argument of *Paradise Lost* Milton states his intention to pursue 'Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme' (l.16). Paradoxically, he appears to be employing the humility *topos* as he invokes God's help :

> What in me is dark
> Illumine. What is low , raise and support;
> That to the height of this great argument
> I may assert Eternal Providence,
> And justify the ways of God to men.
> (ll.22-26) *The Norton Anthology* Vol.1.

> amused me except writing verses I would give up that art for the present, for I am doing no good.[43]

Not only is *The Earthly Paradise* structurally similar to Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales,* but there is also a common authorial intent. The purpose of all the tales is twofold: to entertain and to inform. This duality of function is central to a great deal of mediaeval literature. In Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales,* for example, the Host, Harry Bailey, declares that the finest stories are those which possess the 'best sentence and moost solaas' ('pleasing instruction', in other words).[44] Chaucer emphasises the didactic nature of his tales when he asserts at the end of *The Canterbury Tales* that, 'For oure book[45] seith, "Al that is written is written for our doctrine," and this is myn entente.' [46] The cathartic power of storytelling, furthermore, both for the audience and the speaker, is underscored by the multi-layered structure of the narratives. Morris's fictional characters, like those of Boccaccio and Chaucer, are certainly entertained and instructed by storytelling. Boccaccio's Author derives solace from his loveless plight by 'offering some distraction to those in need of it',[47] and throughout the 'Apology' Morris appears to assert that his historical tale is a welcome diversion from contemporary woes:

> The heavy trouble, the bewildering care
> That weighs us down who live and earn our bread,
> These idle verses have no power to bear;
> So let me sing of names remembered,
> Because they, living not, can ne'r be dead,
> Or long time take their memory quite away
> From us poor singers of an empty day.[48]
>
> (ll. 15-21)

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[43] *Letters,* Vol. I**,** p. 100.
[44] L.D. Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.36, l.798.
[45] Chaucer is referring to the Holy Bible.
[46] *The Riverside Chaucer,* p.328, l.1083.
[47] *The Decameron,* p.4.
[48] *C.W.* Vol III, p.1.

Morris, it could be argued, is declaring here that, as a poet, he has 'no power' to assuage the 'heavy trouble' of Victorian Britain. He is, as Macdonald puts it, 'decoupling poetry from the political function it held for his romantic predecessors.'[49] Thomson also claims that Morris demonstrates no conscious political motivation in the 'Prologue':

> In its sum it is a confession of defeat: considered within the tradition of the romantic movement, it is a rejection of Shelley's claims for the poet, a refusal to sustain the struggles of Keats for full poetic consciousness and responsibility. The tension between the ideal and the real, between the rich aspirations of life and art and the ignoble and brutal fact, which underlies the best of Keat's poetry and (in a more complex way) Morris's own early poems, is no longer present.[50]

This is a persuasive argument. However, as has been previously mentioned, Morris was being consciously ironic when he described poets as 'idle singers'. The words 'bewildering care that weighs us down who live and earn our bread', for example, call to mind the poor working conditions that factory workers endured in order to earn subsistence wages in the nineteenth century.

A further similarity between *The Earthly Paradise* and *The Decameron* is that Morris's Wanderers, like Boccaccio's protagonists, are fleeing from the plague. We see Boccaccio speculating as to the causes of the outbreak of the Black Death in 1348 from which his characters take flight, for example:

> Some say that it descended upon the human race through the influence of heavenly bodies, others that it was a punishment signifying God's righteous anger at our iniquitous way of life. But whatever its cause, it had originated some years earlier in the East, where it had claimed countless lives before it unhappily spread westward, growing in strength as it swept relentlessly on from one place to the next.[51]

Boccaccio identifies the source, if not the cause, of the plague epidemic in Florence as the 'East'. Certainly, in the fourteenth century Florence had important trade links

[49] Macdonald, p.93.
[50] Thompson, p.121.
[51] Boccaccio, pp.6-7.

with China and India and, in addition, as Paul Slack asserts, the Mongol warriors who laid siege to Caffa in the Crimea in 1346 'probably carried the plague with them from the Eurasian steppe to the Black Sea, giving it easy access to the Mediterranean'.[52] The source of the plague was exogenous, but its rapid spread throughout Europe in the fourteenth century was only possible because of the overcrowded cities which were a consequence of the increase in commerce. Such a dense concentration of urban populations meant that the infection was easily and rapidly transmitted. As Slack further explains, 'the introduction of 'new' diseases to crowded populations not yet adapted to them, generally through new avenues of trade, conquest, or colonisation, disturbed local ecological balances between pathogens, parasites and humans with lethal consequences.'[53] Pandemics such as the Black Death in the fourteenth century are in many ways a result of people's greed for wealth and power.

It could be argued that in Morris's 'Prologue' the disease of the human body (plague) is an allegory for the malaise of Victorian society. The 'plague' is brought on by the industrialisation which destroys people's lives as well as the environment and is caused by the entrepreneurs' lust for wealth. The plague as a literary motif had been used before, notably by Dickens[54] in *Little Dorrit* (1855-57). In this novel, which is an indictment of the Victorian legal system, specifically the existence of the notoriously ineffective debtors' prisons, and the exploitative nature of capitalists, Dickens employs the plague as a metaphor for greed. Chapter thirteen entitled, 'The Progress of an Epidemic', for example, opens with this explicit allegory:

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[52] Paul Slack, *Plague: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 26.

[53] Slack, p.22.

[54] Morris was a great admirer of Dickens of whom he said in 1886, 'to my mind of the novelists of our generation Dickens is immeasurably ahead.' *Letters,* Vol. II, p.517. Morris shared Dickens's contempt for the English legal system. In his socialist morality play, *The Tables Turned; or, Nupkins Awakened* (1887) Morris calls the harsh, incompetent judge Mr Justice Nupkins and the greedy barrister with dubious ethics Mr Hungary Q.C.

> That it is at least as difficult to stay a moral affliction as a physical one; that such a disease will spread with the malignity and rapidity of the Plague; that the contagion, when it has once made head, will spare no pursuit or condition, but will lay hold of people in the soundest health, and become developed in the soundest constitutions; it is a fact as firmly established by experience as that we human creatures breathe an atmosphere.[55]

In addition to the horrors of the Black Death, the fourteenth century was a time of great political upheaval throughout Europe[56] and it is plausible that story-telling was for Boccaccio and Chaucer as beneficial as it was for their fictional creations. Just as Boccaccio's protagonists employ the tales as a psychological defence against the reality of almost inevitable infection and ensuing death, so, too, does Boccaccio use his writing as a protective mechanism to block out, albeit temporarily, the reality of everyday life. During this unhappy period of his life, writing *The Earthly Paradise* was a therapeutic experience for Morris, also. Always reticent about personal matters, he found expression for his despair in his poetry. As Morris's narrator declares in the 'Prologue', 'For grief once told brings somewhat back of peace'.[57]

Morris's admiration for mediaeval literature is indisputable. He was, for example, described by Adams as 'a successor to Boccaccio and to Chaucer'.[58] It is, however, highly likely that *The Earthly Paradise* was inspired, at least in part, by the literature of the Anglo-Saxon period, particularly the elegies, as well. There had been, in the first half of the nineteenth century, a resurgence of interest in Old English literature. Poetry from this time was not popular in England after the Norman Conquest, and by the end of the eleventh century it had been superseded by ballads

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[55] Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (London: The Queensway Press, 1936), p. 533.

[56] According to Jonathan Usher, the fourteenth century, the age in which Boccaccio lived, was one of multiple crises in banking and commerce and in agricultural and industrial productivity. Boccaccio was also illegitimate, which may have given him an added sense of insecurity.

[57] *C.W.* Vol III, p.5. (l.16).

[58] Adams & Rolfe, p.18.

and metrical romances. As Carl Berkhout has stated, 'with the replacement of a Saxon by a Norman nobility, the English language had […] changed radically; and very few later medieval readers of English could understand the literary remains of the Saxon period.'[59] During the Renaissance, however, there was an emerging interest in the Anglo-Saxon period but it was predominantly the theological and legal writings that were studied, often for political reasons. In a bid to justify Queen Elizabeth I's position as Supreme Governor of the Protestant Church Of England Matthew Parker (1504-1575),[60] for instance, argued that the doctrine and practice of the pre-conquest English church, the *Eccelesia Anglicana*, had been allied to, but independent of, the Church of Rome. Though Parker was the first to appropriate Anglo-Saxon writings in order to justify the autonomy of the Church in England, he was not the last. In the following century, in 1643 to be exact, Abraham Wheelock, Professor of Arabic at Cambridge, produced an Old English edition of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica.* Wheelock's stance was the same as Parker's: the Anglo-Saxon Church of Bede was not a 'Roman but an English Church to which the reformers had returned.'[61] Notwithstanding the often polemical and political appropriation of Anglo-Saxon writings, the antiquarian interest in Old English language and literature continued with publications such as Milton's[62] *History of*

[59] Carl T. Berkhout & Milton McC. Gatch, *Anglo-Saxon Scholarship: the first three centuries* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1978), p. ix.

[60] Parker, Elizabeth's first Archbishop of Canterbury, collected Anglo-Saxon vernacular manuscripts, studied the language and produced *A Testimonie of Antiquitie* (1566/77), in which he cites a sermon of Bishop Ælfric, the tenth-century mass priest as justification for his theory that the Anglican Church was autonomous. Parker's argument was highly contentious for, as Michael Murphy has argued, the Anglo-Saxon church was one of the most vigorous supporters of the papacy. [See 'Antiquary to Academic: the progress of Anglo-Saxon scholarship' Berkhout & Gatch, p.2.] Parker was, nevertheless, an influential theologian and one of the primary creators of *The Thirty-Nine Articles,* the defining *credo* of the Anglican Church.

[61] Murphy, p.6.

[62] There is a theory that Milton's great epic, *Paradise Lost* (1667) was influenced by early English texts. This notion was first advanced by William Nicolson, The Bishop of Carlisle, in 1706 and promulgated again, a century later, by Sharon Turner in his *History of the Anglo-Saxons* (1799-1805). Turner said that *Paradise Lost* 'owed something to the paraphrase of Caedmon'. Morris, however, did not like Milton's works. He omits Milton from his list of Best One Hundred Books with the *apologia, '*I hope I shall escape Boycotting at the

Britain to the Norman Conquest (1670), George Hickes' Old English grammar, *Institutiones Grammaticae* (1689), and Elizabeth Elstob's *Rudiments of Grammar for the Anglo-Saxon Tongue* (1715).[63]

Thus, by the middle of the eighteenth century, according to Donald Scragg, 'the Anglo-Saxons were looked upon increasingly as the founding fathers of the nation.'[64] This interest continued into the nineteenth century with several influential publications, such as Sharon Turner's four volume *History of the Anglo-Saxons* (1799-1805), a political and cultural history, which was, according to Payne, 'as readable as a Walter Scott novel'[65] and John Josias Conybeare's *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (1826).[66] Conybeare's volume comprised the known poetic texts in Old English, categorised into eight genres, including elegiac poetry. Conybeare and Turner were responsible for drawing the attention of the English public to the *Exeter Book* and *Beowulf.* The scholarship of these two men effectively brought Anglo-Saxon poetry into the English literary canon for, as Richard Payne has observed, 'their works applied the newly evolved literary theory to specific Old English poetic texts.'[67] This meant that, by the time Morris was born in 1834, knowledge and awareness of the history and literature of the Anglo-Saxon period was on the increase. As Chris Jones argues, 'that a form of "English Poetry" was written long before Chaucer was obvious to any well-informed Victorian reader.'[68]

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hands of my countrymen for leaving out Milton; but the union of his cold classicalism with Puritanism (the two things which I hate most in the world) repels me so that I *cannot* read him.' *Letters,* Vol. II, p. 517.

[63] Elizabeth Elstob was the sister of William Elstob, one of a group of Oxford Anglo-Saxon scholars, (the 'nest of Saxonists') in the latter half of the seventeenth century.

[64] Donald Scragg & Carole Weinberg eds., *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 5.

[65] Richard C. Payne, 'The Rediscovery of Old English Poetry in the English Literary Tradition' (Berkhout & Gatch), p.155.

[66] John Josias Conybeare was Rawlinson Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford from 1808-1812.

[67] Payne, p.155.

[68] Chris Jones, *Strange Likeness: The Use of Old English in Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.2.

This rediscovery of Old English poetry was a product of the Romantic period. The heroic and elegiac poetry that influenced the revival of Old English also engendered the creative aspects of Romantic neo-mediaevalism. Sir Walter Scott's[69] corpus, for example, included poetry inspired by the history of the Anglo-Saxon period, namely, *Harold the Dauntless* (1817) as well as his more famous novels of courtly romance, such as *Ivanhoe* (1819) and *Quentin Durward* (1823). Morris, too, was influenced by Old English and Norse literature as well as that of the mediaeval period. In his autobiographical letter to Andreas Scheu in September 1883, Morris wrote that:

> in 1858 I published a volume of poems *The Defence of Guenevere:* exceedingly young also and very mediaeval; and then after a lapse of some years conceived the idea of my *Earthly Paradise,* and fell to work very hard at it. I had about this time extended my historical reading by falling in with translations from the old Norse literature, and found it a good corrective to the maundering side of mediaevalism. [70]

By the time he was writing *The Earthly Paradise,* Morris was beginning to look to sources other than the mediæval literature that had inspired his earlier poetry. As Jones states, 'Old English literature has proved to be a storehouse of technique, imagery and subject material'[71] and, as a result, would have appealed to Morris. In addition, the elegiac poems, specifically 'The Wanderer', 'The Seafarer' and 'The Wife's Lament' have in common with *The Earthly Paradise* themes such as exile, the yearning for lost fellowship and the transitory nature of life. These elegies are also imbued with stoicism, a feature of Nordic literature which was to inspire Morris's great epic poem *Sigurd the Volsung.*[72] Indeed, in her introduction to

[69] Sir Walter Scott was a great favourite of Morris. He includes on his list of Best One Hundred Books 'Scott's novels (except the one or two that he wrote when he was hardly alive).' Presumably, Morris was referring to *Count Robert of Paris* (1832) and *Castle Dangerous* (1831).
[70] *Letters,* Vol. II, p.229.
[71] Jones, p.3.
[72] See Chapter Four of this thesis.

The Earthly Paradise May Morris quotes a contemporary unnamed reviewer who comments on the stoicism in Morris's poem:

> True sorrow is sharply bitter; but there is a mood of mind which is sorrowful in form and yet in substance hardly so. It is the mood of a man who recognizes the tragic conditions and limitations of human life, but who recognizes them as inevitable, universal, not to be subdued nor escaped from, but to be accepted and made the best of.[73]

Morris was not able to read Old English before 1892[74] although he certainly became familiar with Anglo-Saxon literature in translation at an earlier stage in his life. This theory is supported by the fact that Morris included Anglo-Saxon lyrical pieces 'like the Ruin & the Exile' [75] on his list of Best One Hundred Books which he compiled in 1886, in response to a request by the editor of *The Pall Mall Gazette.* This list comprises what Morris considered 'works of art'[76] and those books which 'profoundly impressed'[77] him. Unfortunately, however, he does not say when he first read any of them. Morris certainly had access to many textbooks as a schoolboy at Marlborough College and may even have encountered some Old English elegiac poetry there, too. It is more likely, however, that it was at Oxford that Morris learned about Anglo-Saxon history and literature. English language and literature were not taught as academic subjects[78] but, whilst Morris was a student at Oxford, he would have had access to the rich collection of books and manuscripts in the Bodleian Library. In addition to the works of Sharon Turner, there were numerous volumes by the leading Anglo-Saxon scholar, Benjamin Thorpe (1782-1870). These included Thorpe's translation of Rasmus Rask's *A Grammar of the Anglo-Saxon Tongue*

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[73] *C.W.* Vol. III,p.xxvij.
[74] In preparation for his own translation of *Beowulf,* Morris studied Old English in 1892 under the tutelage of Anglo-Saxon scholar, Alfred J. Wyatt.
[75] *Letters,* Vol. II, p. 516.
[76] Ibid., p. 514.
[77] Ibid., p. 514.
[78] Oxford University offered its first examinations in English Language and Literature in 1896.

(1830), his own *Analecta Anglo-Saxonica* (1834),[79] his two volume, *A History of England under Anglo-Saxon Kings* (1845) and his 1855 volume, *Anglo-Saxon Poems of Beowulf.* Most significantly, Morris had access to the Bodleian Library's copy of Thorpe's 1842 translation[80] of the *Codex Exoniensis* (*Exeter Book*).

We cannot of course be certain that Morris studied Thorpe's translation of the *Exeter Book* whilst at Oxford, but there are several convincing arguments which support this hypothesis. The text was available in the Bodleian Library and Morris was a voracious reader with a scholarly interest in history. He was influenced by another of Benjamin Thorpe's books, *Northern Mythology* (1851),[81] and it is highly probable that, as an admirer of Thorpe's work, Morris would have endeavoured to read as much of Thorpe's corpus as possible. It is just conceivable that Morris first read Anglo-Saxon poetry later in life but this seems unlikely.[82] In 1886, Morris specifically mentions two poems from the *Exeter Book*, 'The Ruin' and 'The Exile'. Translations of neither of these poems appear in the other leading publication of the age, Sweet's *Anglo-Saxon Reader* (1876),[83] however. The poem cited by Morris as 'The Exile' is the untitled verse at folio 115 in the *Exeter Book*: it is Thorpe who titles it 'The Exile's Complaint'.[84] Of this poem (and 'The Ruin') Thorpe acknowledges the

[79] A copy of the *Analecta Anglo-Saxonica* shelf copy 34.654 is still in the Bodleian Library today. The arrival date stamp is 1834.

[80] This translation was commissioned and published by the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1842.

[81] See Chapter One of this Thesis.

[82] In an essay on Morris's translation of *Beowulf,* Chris Jones notes that Morris's interest in Anglo-Saxon poetry 'clearly pre-dated the *Beowulf* project' (i.e. 1892). Jones further suggests that Morris was familiar with the lyrics of the *Exeter Book* through the 'translation of Charles Elton, whose *The Origins of English History* had been published in 1882.' Elton, however, did not publish a translation of the *Exeter Book*. In his *History,* Elton quotes only short extracts from 'The Ruin' (p.369) and 'The Exile's Complaint' (p.384) and in both cases cites Thorpe's 1842 translation of *Codex Exoniensis* as his source.
Chris Jones, 'The Reception of William Morris's *Beowulf'. Writing On The Image: Reading William Morris* ed. David Latham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 197-208.
Charles Isaac Elton, *Origins of English History* 2nd ed. (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1890).

[83] Interestingly, the Anglo-Saxon scholar, A.J. Wyatt who helped Morris with his translation of *Beowulf* did not include 'The Ruin' and 'The Exile' in his own *Anglo-Saxon Reader* first published in 1919.

[84] It was John Josias Conybeare in his *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (1826) who first gave the poem the title used by Thorpe.

difficulties for the translator and says in his preface that, '[…] we can only deplore our profound ignorance of the circumstances under which they were written and of the persons, places and events to which they allude.'[85]

'The Exile's Complaint', now known as 'The Wife's Lament', is one of the most enigmatic of the elegies in the *Exeter Book*. According to Elaine Treharne, 'a substantial number of interpretations of the status of the speaker and the referent have been proposed ranging from the allegorical (Christ and the Church; the body and soul) to the literal (a woman's lament about a man or two men; a retainer's lament about his lost lord).'[86] The scholar who taught Morris Old English in 1892, Alfred J. Wyatt, does not include this poem in his *Anglo-Saxon Reader* (first published in 1919) but does refer to it in his notes on 'The Wanderer' as 'The Wife's Complaint'.[87] Clearly, then, Wyatt viewed the narrator of the poem as female. Benjamin Thorpe, however, interprets the poem as a male retainer's lament for his lost lord; nowhere in his rendering does he refer to the speaker as a woman. For example, here are the last few lines of Thorpe's translation of the poem:

Droegeð se min wine
micle modeceare; he gemon to oft
wynlicran wic. Wa bið þam þe sceal
of langoþe loefes abiden.

[my friend endures
great mental care,
he too oft remembers
a more joyous dwelling.
Woe is to him who must
(from weariness)
His friend await][88]
(ll. 21-27)

[85] Benjamin Thorpe, *Codex Exoniensis* (London: Society of Antiquaries of London, 1842), p.x www.ebooks.bodleian.ox.ac.uk (accessed 29/06/2013).
[86] Elaine Treharne ed., *Old and Middle English c.890-c1400: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 76.
[87] A.J. Wyatt, *An Anglo-Saxon Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), p. 262.
[88] Benjamin Thorpe, p.444.

In contrast, Elaine Treharne translates these lines as follows:

> My beloved suffers
> much mental torment; he remembers too often
> a more joyful dwelling. It is misery for those who, longing,
> have to wait for a loved one.[89]
> (ll. 50-53)

Thorpe translates the word 'wine' as 'friend'; the narrator laments the loss of male companionship. Treharne, however, translates the same word as 'beloved', identifying the speaker in the poem as feminine. The theory that the speaker in 'The Wife's Lament' is female has been generally accepted since Wyatt's *Reader* was published in 1919.[90] Patricia Belanoff, for example, in a recent essay[91] has argued that 'The Wife's Lament' belongs to a genre of popular, rather than courtly, songs designated by their Germanic name, *frauenleider.* These songs are enigmatic and allusive and typically focus on the pain and sorrow brought about by separation from a male companion or lover.

More significantly, the gender of the speaker in 'The Wife's Lament' is established early on in the poem by the inflexions of the words *geomorre* (line 1) and *minre sylfre* (line 2). It appears that Thorpe missed the significance of these words, although he did indicate in a footnote that he considered *minre sylfre* to be a corruption of *minne sylfes*[92] but he makes no comment on the word *geomorre.*[93] It is,

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[89] Treharne, p. 79.

[90] This was the accepted view by then. In 1908, in an article in The *Journal of Modern Philology* William W. Lawrence referred to the poem as 'The Banished Wife's Lament' *M.P.* 5 (1908), pp. 387-405.

[91] Patricia Belanoff, 'Women's Songs, Women's Language' *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature* eds. Helen Damico & Alexandra Hennesey Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 191.

[92] Benjamin Thorpe, *Codex Exoniensis. A Collection of Anglo-Saxon Poetry, From A Manuscript In The Library Of The Dean And Chapter Of Exeter, With An English Translation, Notes, And Indexes.*(London: Richard & John E. Taylor, 1947), p.441.

[93] Thorpe does not include the word *geomorre* in either his 'Notes and Corrections' or his 'Verbal Index'. It is possible that he considered that it, too, was an instance of 'false orthography and ignorance on the part of the scribe' which, according to his 'Preface' occurred in the *Exeter Book* to a 'greater degree than any other manuscript [he had] seen of Anglo-Saxon poetry'. In his 1908 essay, William W. Lawrence, however, describes Thorpe's error as a 'high-handed restoration of the masculine form'. p.393.

nevertheless, unsurprising that Thorpe read the poem as having a male narrator. As, arguably, the earliest professional English philologist,[94] Thorpe was one of the first to attempt a translation of the entire *Exeter Book*. (When the German philologist, N.F.S Grundtvig, visited the British Museum in 1829 he asked for a transcription of the Exeter Book, only to be told that the Museum did not possess one.)[95] As recently as 1992, in the introduction to *The Exeter Book: A Bibliography,* Bernard J. Miles also acknowledged the difficulties faced by all Old English scholars, stating that 'we consider the editing of the *Exeter Book* to be an ongoing project and admit the limitations of our resources and our fallibility'.[96]

A female speaker is, furthermore, uncommon in Old English poetry, the exceptions being in 'The Wife's Lament' and 'Wulf' and 'Eadwacer'. As Belanoff states, 'all female words expressing grief are filtered through the undeniably male voice of a narrator.'[97] What is more, although Sharon Turner acknowledged the legacy left by the Anglo-Saxons when he stated that, 'a large part of what we most love and venerate in our customs, laws and institutions originated with our Anglo-Saxon ancestors', [98] the prevailing early Victorian idea of the Anglo-Saxons, with their language rich in words for weapons, combat and ships, was as a 'fighting, seafaring folk'. [99] Moreover, when discussing 'Native and Vernacular Poetry' in his *History,* Turner made the rather sweeping assertion that 'in Anglo-Saxon times, though women were highly respected and valued […] that cultivated feeling which we call love, in its intellectual tenderness and finer sympathies was neither

[94] Despite his reputation as an eminent scholar, Thorpe never held an academic post.
[95] Hans Aarsleff, *The Study of Language in England , 1780-1860* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 186.
[96] Bernard James Muir, *The Exeter Book: A Bibliography* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1992), p. ix.
[97] Belanoff, p.193.
[98] Sharon Turner *History of the Anglo-Saxons* Vol 1 (1799-1805), p.vii . ebooks.bodleian.ox.ac.uk.
[99] James Morgan Hart, *A Syllabus of Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Cincinnati: Robert Clark & Co, 1881), p.9.

predominant nor probably known'.[100] Thus, throughout the first half of the nineteenth century the Anglo-Saxon period was perceived as an era when men were valued as heroes and their deeds were the subject of poetry and history. It was highly unlikely, therefore, that a Victorian translator would believe that the love between a man and a woman would be the subject of Anglo-Saxon poetry, and almost inconceivable that a woman could have been the speaker in the poem now known as 'The Wife's Lament'.

All these factors indicate that Morris was acquainted with Thorpe's translation of the *Exeter Book* by the time he began writing *The Earthly Paradise* in the 1860s. The influence of the Old English elegies is most obvious in the 'Prologue'[101] in which the Wanderers' adventures before reaching the Greek island are recounted. The Wanderers are exiles, sailing the seas in search of a utopia but on their quest they endure many hardships not least, the loss of many of their comrades. The 'Prologue' is imbued with a weary cynicism which reflects Morris's own loss of hope at that time. Morris was, in effect, composing his own elegy. Just as the Wanderers failed to find their terrestrial paradise, so, too, had Morris. His Red House artistic community had failed, his marriage was deeply troubled and all around him he saw the social and environmental consequences of industrialisation.

In *The Earthly Paradise* Morris employs many of the conventions found in Old English poetry. As has been previously stated, each pair of stories is introduced by a poem bearing the name of the month in which the tales are related. These introductory verses, which are lyrical in tone, begin with an ode to the relevant month

[100] Turner, p.339.

[101] Morris originally titled the Prologue, ' Fools' Paradise' then changed it to 'The Wanderers', before finally settling on 'Prologue: The Wanderers'.

but always end with a return to the main narrative, that is to say the Wanderers, the City Elders and their tales. Here are the opening lines of 'March', for instance:

> Slayer of the winter, art thou here again?
> O welcome, thou that bring'st the summer nigh!
> The bitter wind makes not thy victory vain,
> Nor will we mock thee for thy faint blue sky.[102]
> (ll.1-4)

These lines are followed by a reminder of the brevity of life as the narrator quotes the words of Death:

> "Rejoice, lest pleasureless ye die.
> Within a little time must ye go by.
> Stretch forth your open hands, and while ye live
> Take all the gifts that Death and Life may give."[103]
> (ll.18-21)

The narrator then returns to the main story:

> Then, all being satisfied with plenteous feast,
> There spoke an ancient man, the land's chief priest,
> Who said: "Dear Guests, the year begins today,
> And fain are we, before it pass away,
> To hear some tales of that now altered world,
> Wherefrom our fathers in old time were hurled
> By the hard hands of fate and destiny.[104]
> (ll. 7-13)

This deviation from the plot in order to make a moral comment is a literary device common in the Old English elegies. On this point, Lawrence commented that 'Anglo-Saxon poets often turn away from the matter in hand, both in epic and lyric, to introduce moral reflections suggested by the situation.'[105]

The 'Prologue' and the structure of *The Earthly Paradise* may have been influenced by Morris's knowledge and appreciation of Old English poetry, but the tales themselves are drawn from a much wider body of literature. Morris's

[102] *C.W.* Vol. III, p.82.
[103] Ibid., p.82.
[104] Ibid., p.84.
[105] Lawrence, p.390.

retelling of old familiar legends using three levels of narrative: himself, the narrator and the Wanderers or Elders, reveals much of his socio-political thought. It was some years before Morris was publicly to articulate his concerns about the state of contemporary society. These can, however, be discerned in an eco-social reading of *The Earthly Paradise.*

(III) *The Earthly Paradise*

(i) Social equality and the sense of community

As has been previously stated, the themes of exile, loss of loved ones and the inevitability of death dominate the Old English elegies, especially *The Wanderer, The Seafarer* and *The Wife's Lament* (which Morris knew as *The Exile's Complaint*). The importance of the *comitatus* and the longing for the lost lord, topics central to these three Old English poems are apparent, particularly, in Morris's 'Prologue'.[106] One of the Wanderers, Rolf, describes his feelings after the death of his leader:

> Midst this there died the captain, Nicholas
> Whom, though he brought us even to this pass,
> I loved the most of all men; even now
> When that seems long past, I can scarce tell how
> I bear to live, since he could live no more.[107]
> (ll. 24-28)

These lines are strongly redolent of the anguish felt by the narrators of *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer* and in Thorpe's translation of *The Exile's Complaint:*

> Ful oft mec her wraþe begeat
> Fromsiþ frean.[108]
> (ll.19-20)

> Full oft me here heavily o'erwhelm'd

[106] The 'Prologue' contains the account of the Wanderers' travels before they reach the Greek island.
[107] *C.W.* Vol. III, p.77.
[108] *Codex Exoniensis,* p. 443.

my lord's departure.

The importance of fellowship is as evident throughout the 'Prologue' as it is in the Old English elegies. Morris's Wanderers leave their homeland which might have been 'a kindly giver of wife, child and friend'[109] to seek a better life. Loyalty to one's comrades is paramount. When their camp is attacked at dead of night by savages, Rolf, fearless for his own safety, rushes to help his companions:

> And striking out I saw a naked man
> Fall 'neath my blow, nor heeded him, but ran
> Unto the captain's tent, for there indeed
> I saw my fellows stand in desperate need,
> Beset with foes[110]
>
> (ll. 17-21)

Their journey was long and arduous, as had been foretold by the Swabian priest:

> It yet may be our lot to wander wide
> Through many lands before at last we come
> Unto the gates of our enduring home[111]
>
> (ll. 28-30)

For Morris's wandering exiles, their 'enduring home' is the 'commonweal'[112] offered to them by the City Elders. They find an earthly utopia comparable, for example, to the heavenly paradise sought by the protagonist in *The Seafarer,* one of the Old English elegies.

Throughout the 'Prologue' Morris alludes to the perfidious mistreatment of the weak by the powerful. In the third land that the Wanderers encounter, the villagers, though timid and peaceful, have to suffer sporadic attacks by the cannibals who come from over the mountains. In the true spirit of fellowship, the Wanderers help the villagers by teaching them craftsmanship and they in turn provide food:

> And built them huts, as well we could, for we
> Who dwell in Norway have great mastery

[109] *C.W.* Vol. III, p.12.
[110] Ibid., p.41.
[111] Ibid., p.27.
[112] Ibid., p.5.

> In woodwright's craft; but they in turn would bring
> Wild fruits to us, and many a woodland thing,
> And catch us fish, and show us how to take
> The smaller beasts[…][113]
>
> (ll.13-17)

The Wanderers and the villagers live in fellowship and in symbiosis with nature. They live on 'wild fruits', 'fish' and 'smaller beasts', suggesting that they only use what is necessary for material well-being without destroying the environment.

The Wanderers find themselves in another land where they are venerated by its people as though they were royalty. Rolf recounts that:

> House had we, noble with walls and towers,
> Lovely with gardens, cooled with running streams,
> And rich with gold beyond a miser's dreams,
> And men and women slaves, whose very lives
> Were in our hands; and fair and princely wives
> If so we would; and all things for delight,
> Good to taste or beautiful to sight
> The land might yield.[114]
>
> (ll.25-32)

Seduced by the material riches, the Wanderers are diverted from their quest. Such an existence, however, sustainable only by the exploitation of their fellow beings (slaves) as well as the land, is unfulfilling and the Wanderers are eventually tricked into leaving.

The Wanderers suffer many more arduous years of travel and only find peace when they reach the Greek island. They are treated 'like brothers'[115] by the kindly country folk and brought to the metropolis to meet the City Elders in a 'country cart and wain.'[116] In the spirit of true fellowship, the Elders refuse payment for the services rendered to the Wanderers by their people, saying:

> O friends, content you! This is much indeed,

[113] *C.W.* Vol. III, p.45.
[114] Ibid., p. 56.
[115] Ibid., p.79.
[116] Ibid., p.79

> And we are paid, thus garnering for our need
> Your blessings only,[117]
>
> (ll. 16-18)

This idyllic location is not, however, without hierarchy. It does have rulers who sit on 'thrones of gold',[118] but the city elders inhabit a 'council-house' [119] which implies a wise and considerate, rather than an autocratic, regime. This is reminiscent of the Anglo-Saxon period when rulers were elected by the *witena-gemot (meeting of wise men*),[120] the elders of the people, rather than by heredity succession.[121] The leaders of the land are wise 'grey-beards' who have the well-being of all their people at heart.

The City Elders suggest that they exchange stories 'since it shall bring us wealth of happy hours',[122] but before the tales begin Morris's narrator interjects with the following lines:

> Think, listener, that I had luck to stand,
> Awhile ago within a flowery land,
> Fair beyond word[123]
>
> (ll.1-3)

Morris's use of the imperative 'think' is redolent of the Old English poetry which begins with a single word commanding the audience's attention: the use of , 'Hwæt' ('Listen!'), for example, in *Beowulf.* Furthermore, the employment of the word 'listener' and not 'reader' underscores the oral roots of the poetry and thus calls to mind the idea of the Anglo-Saxon bard or *scop* who made his living by storytelling. In addition, it is worth noting that Morris often recited poetry to his family and friends.

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[117] Ibid.*,* p.79.
[118] Ibid., p. 4.
[119] Ibid., p.4.
[120] The Norman Conquest effectively ended the power of the *witen.*
[121] According to Anna Vaninskaya, the Teutonic village community was 'the crucial and defining *topos* of Morris's politics'. 'William Morris's Germania: The Roots of Socialism.' *William Morris in the Twenty-First Century,* eds., Phillippa Bennett & Rosie Miles (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2010), pp. 169-192, (p.171).
[122] Ibid., p.80
[123] Ibid.*,* p.80

Richard Dixon, a member of the Oxford 'Set', recalled Morris reading his first poem aloud to his peers:

> We sat down and heard Morris read his first poem, the first that he had ever written in his life. It was called 'The Willow and the Red Cliff'. As he read it, I felt that it was something the like of which had never been heard before.[124]

Throughout the *Earthly Paradise,* Morris's description of the Wanderers and the City Elders swapping tales in a communal hall is reminiscent of the Anglo-Saxon mead-hall in which entire communities were entertained by (mostly familiar) stories, sung or spoken by the *scop.* Morris frequently evokes the image of banqueting, an important feature of heroic hospitality. In the prelude to the second of the 'March' tales, 'The Man Born To Be King', for example, the narrator describes the scene in the following manner:

> But in the hall that ancient company,
> Not lacking younger folk that day at least,
> Softened by spring were gathered at the feast,
> And as the time drew on, throughout the hall
> A horn was sounded, giving note to all
> That they at last the looked-for tale should hear.[125]
> (ll.24-29)

In the above extract Morris depicts a happy group of people of all ages dining and being entertained in a communal building.

The idea that people should live in fellowship and not exploit others is evident throughout the tales themselves as well as the 'Prologue'. 'The Man Born To Be King', for example, is the story of a ruler who tried to prevent the prophesy that he would be succeed by a low-born man coming to pass. The principal source for this tale is the *Gesta Romanorum,*[126] although May Morris identifies the thirteenth-century romance of the Emperor Coustans and Grimm's tale, 'The Devil and the

[124] MacCarthy, p 74.
[125] *C.W.* Vol. III, p.105.
[126] Morris possessed the Roxburghe Club publication edited by Sir Frederick Madden, 1838.

Three Golden Hairs', as additional influences. Morris's version of the famous myth, which is arguably an indictment of a class-conscious hierarchical society, is more subtly nuanced. In the *Gesta Romanorum* version, for example, the servant charged by the King to kill the child does not do so but leaves him in the woods. The boy is found and adopted by a nobleman who raises him as his own. In Morris's version, however, it is a lowly but kindly miller and his wife who find and rear the child. Indeed the child, Michael, who eventually marries the princess Cecily and becomes king, is the biological son of peasants. By emphasising Michael's 'low' birth and upbringing, Morris challenges the idea of any correlation between merit and rank. It is true that other writers, Sir Walter Scott in *The Antiquary* (1816)[127] and Clara Reeve in *The Old English Baron* (1778),[128] for example, diminished differences of rank by endowing their ostensibly low-born heroes with honourable characters. Both Scott and Reeve, however, circumvent any tension between merit and rank by the revelation that their protagonists are of noble birth and, ultimately, validate a hierarchical society. Morris, however, is unambiguous: his own ideal society rested 'on equality of condition.'[129] Michael is a worthy man 'free from all evil thoughts or dread'.[130] Indeed, Michael does not desire riches or power but, rather, derives pleasure from the company of others:

> Whence looking back he saw below
> The town spread out, church, square and street
> And baily, crawling up the feet

[127] Scott's hero, Major Neville, believing himself to be illegitimate, distinguishes himself under an assumed name of Lovel. Eventually, he is revealed as the legitimate son and heir of the Earl of Glenallan.

[128] *The Old English Baron* was a great favourite of Morris. (See Chapter 1 of this thesis). Reeve's hero, the orphan Edmund Lovel, was raised as Edmund Twyford, the son of a labourer, but ultimately regained possession of his father's estate, the Castle of Lovel.
Interestingly, in his 'Prefatory Memoir to Clara Reeve' (1823) Scott dismissed Reeve's novel as 'tame and tedious, not to say mean and tiresome' and said of Reeve that her 'acquaintance of events and characters derived from books alone'. It is, perhaps, no coincidence that the legitimate name of Reeve's hero is appropriated by Scott as the false name of his hero.

[129] 'Useful Work Versus Useless Toil' www.anglocatholicsocialism.org/work Accessed 17/01/2014.

[130] *C.W.* Vol. III, p.147.

Of the long yew-sprinkled hill;
And in the fragrant air and still,
Seeming to gain new life from it,
The doves from roof to roof did flit:
The early fires sent up their smoke
That seemed to him to tell of folk
New wakened unto great delight:[131]
(ll.4-13)

In these lines, Morris paints an idyllic picture of a pre-industrial settlement. His references to 'flitting doves' and 'fragrant and still air' in a town which 'crawls' up the feet of a hill evoke an image of a simple, unhurried life. Unlike the overcrowded industrial conurbations of the nineteenth century, this town is 'spread out', implying a pleasant living space for all the inhabitants. At its heart, however, are the 'church' and the 'square', traditional communal meeting places. The town nestles at the foot of a 'yew-sprinkled hill' which suggests that the town enhances, rather than blights, the surrounding landscape.

The image of Michael as an individual content to live in fellowship with others free from the desire for the accumulation of material wealth and power is a stark contrast to the sovereign who would have had him killed. This king, like many of Morris's contemporaries, sets great store by hereditary status and wealth as the Sage in the tale observes:

Thine ancient line
Thou holdest as a thing divine,
So long and undisturbed it is,[132]
(ll.12-4)

The importance of the commonweal and empathy with others are recurring themes in Morris's epic poem, 'The Proud King' being a case in point. In this story King Jovinian was so proud of his wealth and status that he would stop at nothing in

[131] *C.W.* Vol. III, p.148.
[132] Ibid., p.109.

order to expand his empire. One day an angel takes Jovinian's place whilst he is bathing and no one, not even his wife or his most loyal servants, recognises him. Eventually, after the 'helpless agony'[133] of being alone, Jovinian repents, regains his throne and rules wisely thereafter. Morris's main source for this story is the *Gesta Romanorum,* although May Morris also refers to the Italian miracle play or *rappresentazione* as being influential. Morris deviates from the *Gesta Romanorum* account in which the angel informs the entire court of his intention to humble the king. In Morris's version, everyone is fooled by the angel which makes his story a little darker, particularly on a psycho-sexual level as Jovinian's wife does not recognise the angel as an imposter.[134] Jovinian's loss of fellowship is the cruel, yet deserved, punishment for his *hubris* and greedy lust for power:

> My sire indeed was called a mighty king,
> Yet in regard of mine, a little thing
> His kingdom was; moreover his grandsire
> To him was a prince of narrow lands,
> Whose father, though to things he did aspire
> Beyond most men, a great knight of his hands,
> Yet ruled some little town where now there stands
> The kennel of my dogs; then may not I
> Rise higher yet, nor like poor wretches die?[135]
>
> (ll. 13-21)

In his bid to surpass the wealth and reputation of his ancestors, Jovinian has such little regard for his fellow humans that he is prepared to demolish a town and make its people homeless in order to build a grand kennel for his hounds. Ironically, his favourite hunting dog does not recognise him when the angel has taken his place:

> The mighty hound that crouched before the throne
> Flew at him fain to tear him limb from limb,
> Though in the woods the brown bear's dying groan,
> He and that beast had often heard alone.[136]
>
> (ll. 30-33)

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[133] *C.W.* Vol. III, p.265.
[134] Perhaps, Morris had Rossetti in mind as Jane's 'imposter' husband.
[135] *C.W.* Vol. III, p.243.
[136] *C.W.* Vol. III, p.257.

Jovinian's wanton disregard for the welfare of his subjects as he constantly tries to expand his empire has an obvious parallel in Morris's opinion of the egregious excesses of competitive capitalism in pursuit of profit. In 1885, in 'The Manifesto of the Socialist League', Morris promulgates his view that:

> The profit-grinding system is maintained by competition, or veiled war, not only between the conflicting classes, but also within the classes themselves; there is always war among the workers for bare subsistence, and among their masters, the employers and middle-men, for the share of profit wrung out of the workers;[137]

King Jovinian exploited his people in order to increase his wealth just as Victorian entrepreneurs 'wrung' profit out of the working classes. 'The Proud King' concludes with a chastened monarch and Morris returns the narrative to his protagonists. The narrator describes the scene in the banqueting hall, where, despite the moral of the story just concluded, the Wanderers consider the reality. Human society *is* hierarchical and often exploitative:

> And yet amidst it, some smiled doubtfully
> For thinking how few men escape the yoke,
> From this or that man's hand, and how most folk
> Must needs be kings and slaves the while they live,
> And take from this man, and to that man give
> Things hard enow.[138]
>
> (ll.20-5)

Despite this pessimistic view of human nature, *The Earthly Paradise* is replete with selfless heroes who delight in the fellowship of others. Milanion, the hero of 'Atalanta's Race', the first story related by one of the City Elders, is a case in point. This is Morris's version of the Greek legend of King Schoeneus's daughter who refuses to marry unless the potential suitor can outrun her. Those who take up the challenge and fail are put to death. Many young men lose their lives as a result.

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[137] www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works Accessed 16/12/2013.
[138] *C.W.* Vol. III, p.265.

Eventually, with the help of Venus, the noble Milanion wins the race and Atalanta's heart. According to May Morris, the two main sources for this tale were Apollodorus's *Bibliotheca* and Ovid. Morris did not, however, laboriously follow either account but rather devised his own version, only using those aspects of the old legends which suited his objective. As May Morris stated in her introduction to the *Collected Works*, 'details of the poems [in *The Earthly Paradise*] are in all cases the result of the poet's own mind working within the framework settled by the main lines of the tale.' [139]

In 'Atalanta's Race', [140] the questing hero Milanion passes through a pleasant pastoral scene before arriving at a city where he is welcomed 'unquestioned of his race or name'.[141] This suggests an open and free society, and this idyllic scene is juxtaposed with man's terrible cruelty as Milanion witnesses a race and the execution of the luckless suitor. Milanion does, however, fall in love with Atalanta and despite warnings determines to take the challenge. Crucially, in Morris's version of this legend, Milanion is motivated solely by his love for Atalanta and desires neither the power nor riches that a marriage to a princess would bring. As he prays to Venus for assistance, Milanion declares that he has no wish for a position of authority:

> "O Queen, thou knowest I pray not for this,
> O set us down together in some place
> Where not a voice can break our heaven of bliss,
> Where nought but rocks and I can see her face,
> Softening beneath the marvel of thy grace,
> Where not a foot our vanished steps can track –
> The golden age, the golden age come back![142]
>
> (ll. 15-21)

[139] Ibid., p.xix.
[140] Appendix III, Figure 16.
[141] *C.W.* Vol. III, p.86.
[142] *C.W.* Vol. III, p.97.

Milanion has no desire for material possessions but, rather, he yearns to live a simple life with the woman he loves.

Likewise, Kiartan, the hero of Morris's rendition of the Icelandic *Laxdale Saga* 'The Lovers of Gudrun', was a skilled warrior but, most significantly, he was kind and generous and empathised with his countrymen:

> And yet withal it was his daily way
> To be most gentle both of word and deed
> And ever folk would seek him in their need,
> Nor was there any child but loved him well.[143]
> (ll.13-6)

Here we have a perfect example of the Nordic hero which Morris so much admired. Kiartan was, like Sigurd,[144] a compassionate warrior-craftsman who was stoic in the face of adversity.

Throughout *The Earthly Paradise* Morris, as he had done in his earlier poetry and prose, emphasises the importance of fellowship to human beings. He evokes the heroic ideal as a positive example of human behaviour. The selfless characters, always compared with selfish ones, are exceptions not the norm. This is evidence of Morris's egalitarianism and also his disquiet at the social inequalities of his era. Morris's heroes are, as Tucker has stated, 'solitary monuments raised in reaction against the age';[145] an age in which many people, particularly the working classes, had no autonomy and were, as a consequence, frequently exploited by the hegemonic élite.

[143] *C.W.* Vol. V, p.274.
[144] See Chapter Four of this thesis.
[145] Tucker, p.469.

(ii) The portrayal of women

As we have already seen, Morris often depicted mythical female characters in a sympathetic way by altering the plot of his sources. In 'Atalanta's Race', for example, Morris deviates from Apollodorus's version in one crucial point. According to the latter, the hapless suitors run the race unarmed and Atalanta carries a dart with which she slays the unsuccessful competitors. In Morris's story, however, Atalanta carries no weapon and does not perform the killings. Instead, the losers are beheaded by the King's executioner:

> And, changed like one who knows his time must be
> But short and bitter, without any word
> He knelt before the bearer of the sword[146]
>
> (ll. 33-40)

Likewise, Atalanta's desire for material wealth is played down in Morris's version. It is true that she is outrun by Milanion because she is tempted by the golden apples which are, arguably, a metaphor for riches. (The analogy here between Atalanta and the biblical Eve is obvious). Significantly, however, Atalanta had already fallen in love with Milanion before the race began as the following lines show:

> Why must she drop her lids before his gaze,
> And even as she casts adown her eyes
> Redden to note his eager glance of praise,
> And wish that she were clad in other guise?[147]
>
> (ll.1-4)

The above passage reads like one from a mediaeval romance. The image of a woman held by the gaze of a man is, however, symbolic of her subjugation. This is redolent of the depiction of women in Pre-Raphaelite painting. On this topic, Jane Thomas has argued that 'the way in which the women featured in the life and work of the Pre-Raphaelites and their associates relinquish, agency, control, and self-

[146] *C.W.* Vol. III, p.88.
[147] Ibid., p. 102.

delineation to the shaping gaze of the male artist/lover.'[148] Despite his undoubted empathy with women, Morris here displays the binary view of women typical of his era, that of the virgin and the whore. Atalanta is simultaneously portrayed by Morris as a beautiful virgin who submits to a dominant male, and as a predatory female who, in effect, emasculates[149] the men whom she seduces with her beauty.

By his adaptation of the plot, however, Morris ameliorates Atalanta's part in the tale and displays his own sympathy for the plight of women. Morris's Atalanta is neither cruel nor bloodthirsty but, like Guenevere (*Defence of Guenevere)* and Helen (*Scenes of Troy*), she is the victim of a brutal patriarchy. Atalanta was, after all, abandoned by her father as a baby because he had wanted a son. Reared by a she-bear and then wood-folk, Atalanta is free from the constraints of court society and lives in closeness with nature, becoming adept at hunting, warfare and, of course, running. Reluctant to be subjected to the will of a husband, she uses the talents she has to avoid the constraints of marriage.

Morris's sympathetic treatment of Atalanta says much about his views on the position of women in Victorian society. It could be argued that the legend is a homage to femininity and the patriarchal status-quo. In spite of acquiring rather masculine attributes, Atalanta is vanquished by a man and, ultimately, made to play her prescribed role in a society controlled by men. Throughout *The Earthly Paradise,* however, Morris portrays mythical female characters in a sympathetic light, often exonerating them of their crimes.

Many of the stories in *The Earthly Paradise,* however, feature 'innocent' women who are cruelly treated by men. One such example is 'The Doom of King

[148] Jane Thomas, 'Gender and Aestheticism in "Pygmalion and the Image"' in *Writing on the Image: Reading William Morris,* pp.61-72.

[149] The unlucky suitors are beheaded which according to Sigmund Freud, is a symbol of emasculation. Freud first presented his theory in 1922 in an essay entitled 'Das Medusenhaupt' ('Medusa's Head').

Acrisius', a retelling of the legend of Perseus. Acrisius, the King of Argos, is warned that he will be killed by the son of his daughter, Danaë. In order to avoid his fate, Acrisius imprisons Danaë in a tower. The god Jove, however, visits her there and Danaë, subsequently, gives birth to his son, Perseus. Mother and baby escape with the help of the gods and years later, after many heroic adventures, Perseus unwittingly slays his grandfather, Acrisius.

Like Atalanta and many of Morris's other heroines, Danaë is imprisoned by a cruel patriarchy. Danaë's incarceration, however, is literal as well as metaphorical. Morris paints a picture of a kind-hearted, sympathetic young woman who, unaware of her father's cruel intentions, speculates as to who the tower's inmate might be:

> The windows small, barred, turned unto the sea,
> That none from land may tell who here may be.
> No doubt some man the King my father fears
> Above all other, here shall pass his years.
> Alas, poor soul! Scarce shall he see the sun,
> Or care to know when the hot day is done,
> Or ever see sweet flowers again, or grass
> Or take much note of how the seasons pass[150]
> (ll.13-20)

Danaë pities the unknown prisoner because he will be unable to interact with nature. The prisoner will 'scarce' see daylight nor will he be able to see 'sweet flowers' or the changes in seasons. Later as a prisoner herself, her hopes of freedom are all associated with the ability to enjoy the beauty of nature:

> Wherefore I think that here I shall not die
> But live to feel the dew falling from the sky,
> And set my feet deep in the meadow grass
> And underneath the scented pine trees pass,[151]
> (ll.6-9)

[150] *C.W.* Vol. III, p. 173.
[151] Ibid., p.183.

Morris's empathy with women is also apparent in 'The Story of Cupid and Psyche'. This story was inspired, according to May Morris, by Apuleius and is the legend of Psyche, a princess whose beauty causes her countrymen to forget Venus. Enraged, the goddess orders that Psyche be sacrificed but she is rescued by Cupid who makes her his wife. Following an act of marital disobedience, Psyche is rejected by Cupid but, after many trials in which she has the help of the Gods and 'All Nature', [152] she is eventually reunited with her lover. Morris deviates from Apuleius's version in one crucial respect. According to Apuleius, Psyche, in a fit of grief and bitterness, causes the death of her sisters whose jealousy initiated the chain of events that led to Cupid's desertion. In Morris's version, however, the invidious sisters are both lured to their deaths by divine intervention, each one believing that she has been chosen by Cupid in place of Psyche:

> But long the time seemed to her, till she came,
> There where her sister once was borne to shame;
> And when she reached the bare cliff's rigged brow
> She cried aloud: "O Love, receive me now,
> Who am not all unworthy to be thine!"[153]
>
> (ll.11-5)

By exonerating her of the crime of murdering her siblings, Morris portrays Psyche in a sympathetic light. In his version, Psyche is cruelly used by her father, her sisters and even Cupid. Her only crime is curiosity; she wanted to look at the face of her husband, suggesting, perhaps, a desire for equality. She had, however, challenged the male hegemony so consequently she must be punished.

Throughout this tale Psyche is aligned with nature. Apart from her physical attributes, analogous with nature's beauty, her emotional state is always reflected in

[152] *C.W.* Vol. IV, p. 4.
[153] Ibid., p.44.

the description of the surrounding landscape. After being rescued by Cupid, for example, she falls asleep on a hillside:

> Then suddenly remembering all her woes,
> She sprang upon her feet, and yet arose
> Within her heart a mingled hope and dread
> Of some new thing; and now she raised her head,
> And gazing round about her timidly,
> A lovely grassy valley could she see
> That steep grey cliffs upon three sides did bound,
> And under these, a sweeping river round,
> With gleaming curves the valley did embrace,
> And seemed to make an island of that place;[154]
> (ll. 7-16)

In the above lines, Psyche, after initial confusion, realises that she is alone and isolated from other humans just as the locus is an 'island', cut-off from the surrounding landscape. From a feminist perspective the idea of female closeness to nature can be troubling. On this matter, Val Plumwood comments that:

> Nature, as the excluded and devalued contrast of reason, includes the emotions, the body, the passions, animality, the primitive or uncivilised, the non-human world, matter, physicality and sense experience, as well as the sphere of irrationality, of faith and of madness. In other words, nature includes everything that reason excludes.[155]

The tradition of associating women with nature and men with reason is symbolic of patriarchal dominance. The exploitation of nature and women by men is, therefore, related. The tale of Cupid and Psyche lends itself to an eco-social or, more exactly, an eco-feminist reading. The allegorical depiction of Psyche as nature, for instance, is quite clear early on in this tale. She 'shrunk like a leaf'[156] as she learned that she was to be sacrificed to the fell monster:

> "O what an evil from thy loins shall spring,
> For all the world this monster overturns,
> He is the bane of every mortal thing,

[154] *C.W.* Vol. IV, p.17.
[155] Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.19.
[156] *C.W.* Vol. IV, p.7.

> And this world ruined, still for more he yearns;
> A fire there goeth from his mouth that burns
> Worse than the flame of Phelegethon the red –
> To such a monster shall thy maid be wed".[157]
>
> (ll.20-6)

These lines in which the Oracle describes the fell monster conjure up the image of a nineteenth-century factory belching out polluting smoke and flames from its chimneys. Just as the monster will destroy Psyche, so, too, does a factory ruin the environment. In addition, the monster's constant yearning for 'more' is analogous to both the rapid increase in industrialisation and in what Morris viewed as the insatiable greed of capitalists. Despite this rather bleak parallel, Morris's story ends on an optimistic note as Psyche becomes a goddess and is reunited with Cupid. The final lines of this tale suggest that Morris himself was already envisioning a land free of factories, one that he was to describe much later in his utopian romance, *News from Nowhere* (1890):

> Bright shone the low sun over all the earth
> For joy of such a wonderful new birth.[158]
>
> (ll.27-8)

Throughout *The Earthly Paradise*, Morris identifies the exploitation of one person (male or female) by another as a terrible crime. 'The Death of Paris' contains another example of Morris's empathy with the position of women.[159] The tale is ostensibly about the death of the Trojan prince who was wounded by a poisoned arrow. The only one who can save Paris is the nymph, Œnone, whom he once loved but had deserted for Helen. Œnone refuses to aid him and Paris, consequently, dies. What is remarkable about Morris's retelling of this legend is his sympathetic treatment of Œnone. She is quite clearly a woman scorned who cruelly exacts her

[157] Ibid., p.6.
[158] Ibid., p.73
[159] This story was completed in August 1869 whilst Morris was at the spa town of Bad-Ems. Morris had taken Jane there because the state of her health had become 'disquieting'. *C.W.* Vol. V, p. xj.

revenge by allowing her ex-lover to die. Morris, however, perhaps because of his own marital troubles, portrays her in an understanding and benevolent way. Indeed, despite its title, much of the tale is devoted to Œnone's feelings of desolation, reminiscent of the Old English elegies. Œnone still feels grief even though ten years have elapsed since Paris abandoned her:

> A gnawing pain that never growth old
> A pain that shall not be washed out by tears.[160]
> (ll.3-4)

These lines seem all the more poignant when an autobiographical reading is applied. Morris could be expressing his own feelings about Jane's betrayal with Rossetti. At the end of the story the narrator utters lines that could also describe Morris's personal situation:

> Too hard, too bitter, the dull years of life,
> Beset at best with many a care and strife,
> To hear withal Love's torment, and the toils
> Wherewith the days of youth and joy he spoils
> Since e'en so God makes equal Eld and Youth,
> Tormenting Youth with lies and Eld with truth;[161]
> (ll.3-8)

As a young man a decade earlier, life had seemed idyllic to Morris: he had a beautiful wife, loyal, like-minded friends and an ideal house in which to live. Morris's vision of a perfect unspoilt land appears in the following early (*c*. 1860) draft of one of the October tales, 'The Man Who Never Laughed Again*':*

> Fair was the world beyond what words can tell,
> A broad vale, blessed with wealth of fruitful trees,
> Above the golden grain, adorned well
> With wondrous flowers, fair mines of moaning bees:[162]
> (ll. 3-6)

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[160] *C.W.* Vol. V, p.12.
[161] Ibid., p.22
[162] William Morris, *The Man Who Never Laughed Again,* British Library, Ms. 45299. f.31.

By 1869, however, the Red House 'community' must have seemed to Morris a distant memory and his distress over Jane's affair with Rossetti can be inferred from his assertion that Love torments 'Youth with lies and Eld with truth'. Œnone (like Morris) is not the archetypal vengeful lover scorned but, rather, someone who loved deeply and yet was betrayed. Paris is unworthy of Œnone's love as he is prepared to lie in order that his life might be saved. He is, as Œnone observes, the 'falsest of all men.'[163]

According to Ruth Kinna, Morris, as a socialist, identified two central issues in relation to the status of women in Victorian society: 'the exploitation of female labour and the institution of bourgeois marriage.'[164] In both situations, women had no autonomy and were exploited by men. It was some years after the publication of *The Earthly Paradise* before Morris explicitly articulated these views but they can be discerned in this poem. As we have seen, Morris appears, at times, to revert to the binary notion of woman as virgin or temptress but his undoubted empathy with plight of women is apparent. In his retelling of various myths, Morris gives the female characters more prominence and psychological depth than his sources. He describes the motivation behind the heroines' legendary monstrous actions and although, he does not exonerate them completely, he ameliorates their 'crimes'. Like Victorian women, Atalanta, Danæ, Œnone and Psyche have no real autonomy but, rather, are subject to a patriarchy which is often cruel and exploitative.

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[163] *C.W.* Vol. V, p.17.

[164] Ruth Kinna, 'Socialist Fellowship and the Woman Question'. *Writing on the Image: Reading William Morris* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 184.

(iii) The importance of rewarding work

In *Earthly Paradise,* on the island surrounded by unpolluted 'clear green water' Morris evokes an image of highly idealised earlier times with men and women happily engaged in useful work. This is in sharp contrast to the useless toil of the factory workers of Morris's day who had to endure dreadful conditions. In his essay 'Useful Work v. Useless Toil' (1884), Morris rails against the exploitative nature of the current capitalist system stating that:

> Capitalistic manufacture, capitalistic land-owning, and capitalistic exchange force men into big cities in order to manipulate them in the interests of capital; the same tyranny contracts the due space of the factory so much that (for instance) the interior of the great weaving shed is almost as ridiculous a spectacle as it is a horrible one. There is no other necessity for all this, save the necessity for grinding profits out of men's lives, and of producing cheap goods for the use (and subjection) of the slaves who grind.[165]

According to Morris, there was 'a mass of people employed in making all those articles of folly and luxury, the demand for which is the outcome of the existence of the rich non-producing classes.'[166]

The inhabitants of the city where the Wanderers are finally offered refuge are, however, clearly happily employed in work:

> And round about it now the maidens throng
> With jest and laughter, and sweet broken song,
> Making but light of labour new begun[167]
> (ll. 4-6)

> A great market-place
> Upon two other sides fills as the space,
> And hence the busy hum of men comes forth;[168]
> (ll. 10-12)

This portrait of a market-place where people exchanged goods that they had produced themselves is redolent of the pre-capitalist era where the ideals of just

[165] *C.W.* Vol. XXIII, pp. 114-5.
[166] 'Useful Work versus Useless' Toil www.anglocatholicsocialism.org/work Accessed 16/12/13.
[167] *C.W.* Vol. III, p.4.
[168] Ibid., p.4.

price and free marketing prevailed. Morris consistently argued that men and women would be happier if the production of goods was based on the practices of the Middle Ages. In his essay 'Art and Industry in the Fourteenth Century' (1890), Morris compares the old commercial practice of bartering with the contemporary capitalist system which he considered exploitative. According to Morris, five centuries previously:

> [c]ommerce, in our sense of the word, did not exist: people produced for their own consumption, and only exchanged the overplus of what they did not consume. A man would then sell the results of his labour in order to buy the wherewithal to live upon or to live better; whereas at present he buy's other people's labour in order to sell its results, that he may buy yet more labour, and so on to the end of the chapter; the mediæval man began with production, the modern begins with money.[169]

This is one of the main tenets of eco-socialism, namely that society should only produce what is necessary for the material well-being of all without destroying the environment.

It is true that Morris often articulated an idealised view of mediaeval commerce as people of the Middle Ages did not always have exclusive rights to any surplus they produced. According to Christopher Dyer, mediaeval peasants 'always expected that their land would yield a surplus, whether for the benefit of the state, the church or their lords, or for exchange of goods and services which they could not obtain from their own land.'[170] In addition, the trade guilds which rose to power in the later Middle Ages were rigidly hierarchical organisations that controlled the commerce within towns. Membership of the guilds was compulsory for artisans practising a particular trade,[171] and there was official regulation of apprenticeships and wage rates. Guilds enforced the compliance of all craftsmen by the use of

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[169] *C.W.* Vol XXII, p.380.
[170] Christopher Dyer, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages: The people of Britain 850-1520* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p.14.
[171] *C.W.* Vol XXX, p. 3.

statutory penalties backed up with a combination of compulsory membership, blackballing and boycott.[172] Morris was not, however, ignorant of the practices of the trade guilds, which he described as 'very harsh and oppressive'.[173] His model was the time before the trade guilds became so powerful.[174] During this period which was referred to by the economist Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929) as the 'era of handicraft', artisans were much more autonomous. Writing in 1914, Veblen argued that, 'in its beginning the handicraft system was made up of impecunious craftsmen, working in severality and working for a livelihood, and the rules of the craft-gilds that presently took shape and exercised control were drawn on that principle.' [175]

The Earthly Paradise contains many descriptions of people enjoying satisfying work. In 'The Love of Alcestis', for example, King Admetus's people are happily engaged in rewarding labour and free from the desire for material riches:

> this King Admetus sat
> Among his people, wearied in such wise
> By hopeful toil as makes a paradise
> Of the rich earth; for light and far away
> Seemed all the labour of the coming day,
> And no man wished for more than then he had,
> Nor with another's mourning was made glad.[176]
> (ll.1-7)

Not only do these people live off the land but they have no desire for anything other than what they require for their own collective consumption. The work is hard but rewarding ('hopeful toil'), and they are happy to cultivate the earth for the good of the

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[172] Stephen Epstein ed., *Guilds, Innovation and the European Economy 1400-1800,* p.61. http://ebooks.cambridge.org. Accessed 19/11/2013.
[173] *C.W.* Vol. XXII, p.384.
[174] In his lecture 'Art and Industry in the Fourteenth Century' (1890) Morris drew the distinction between the trade guilds which were administrative or political and the craft guilds which were associations of artisans. ' These Great Gilds [trade], the corporations of towns, were from the first aristocratic and exclusive, even to the extent of excluding manual workmen;[…] so diametrically opposed to that of the earlier tribal communities, in the tales of which the great chiefs are shown smithying armour, building houses and ships, and sowing their fields, just as the heroes of the *Illiad* and *Odyssey* do' *C.W.* Vol. XXII, p.384.
[175] Thorstein Veblen, *The Instinct of Workmanship and the State of the Industrial Arts (*London: Kessinger Publishing, 2012), p.147.
[176] *C.W.* Vol. IV, p 90.

entire community. Their labour is undertaken freely not forced, as Admetus is not dictatorial but is, in fact, 'little like a king'.[177] The idea of voluntary, as opposed to compulsory , labour is one of the main precepts of eco-socialism: if production were built on unforced labour then people would want to work for personal fulfilment and in order to relate to others. In Morris's tale, even the king is content without material wealth and derives pleasure from the happiness of his countrymen.

An image of happy and fulfilling labour is also apparent in 'The Lady and the Land'. This is a tale of a poor sailor who lands on a seemingly uninhabited Greek island where he finds a damsel in distress. The eponymous Lady of the Land, like Danæ, has been cruelly incarcerated there by her father and, although the sailor decides to rescue her, he lacks the courage required and, ultimately, fails. While this is ostensibly a tale of one man's failure to act in an heroic fashion, it is Morris's description of the landscape which is the most memorable aspect. The island obviously was once a utopia:

> The wood, once ordered in fair grove and glade,
> With gardens overlooked by terraces,
> And marble-paved pools for pleasure made,
> Was tangled now and choked with fallen trees;
> And he who went there with but little ease
> Must stumble by the stream's side, once made meet
> For tender women's dainty wandering feet.[178]
>
> (ll. 1-7)

The above lines could be read as a metaphor for the destruction of the environment by Victorian capitalists. The neglected state of the land also reflects the abandonment of the island's only inhabitant. Ironically, the Lady is imprisoned in a building that was not created for such an ignominious purpose but, rather, like the

[177] Ibid., p. 90.
[178] *C.W.* Vol. IV, p.128.

mediaeval churches much admired by Morris, for the benefit of a whole community. It was, furthermore, built by skilled stone masons who were happy in their work:

> Noble the house was, nor seemed built for war,
> But rather like the work of other days,
> When men, in better peace than now they are,
> Had leisure on the world around to gaze
> And noted well the past times' changing ways;
> And fair with sculptured stories it was wrought,
> By lapse of time unto dim ruin brought. [179]
>
> (ll. 29-35)

This noble edifice has been neglected and is now forgotten just as the craftsmanship that created it has been superseded by what were, according to Morris, utilitarian building methods. Morris agreed with Ruskin, who had stated in *The Stones of Venice* that, 'all good architecture is the expression of national life and character'. [180] In his essay entitled 'The Revival of Architecture'(1888), Morris had the following to say on this subject:

> The enthusiasm of the Gothic revivalists died out when they were confronted by the fact that they form part of a society which will not and cannot have a living style, because it is an economic necessity for its existence that the ordinary everyday work of its population shall be mechanical drudgery. [181]

By the end of 1868, Morris had begun his studies of Icelandic and this interest is reflected in his choice of tales in the later part of *The Earthly Paradise*, and in his next epic poem, *Sigurd the Volsung* (1875). The second of the November tales, for example, is Morris's retelling of the Icelandic *Laxdale Saga*, 'The Lovers of Gudrun' and in this story all of Morris's eco-social concerns can be identified. The Argument is poignant and clearly autobiographical:

> This story shows how two friends loved a fair woman & how he who loved her best had her to wife, though she loved him little or not at all; & how

[179] Ibid., p.128.
[180] *C.W.* Vol XVIII, p.434.
[181] *C.W.* Vol. XXII, p.330.

> one of these two friends gave shame to and received death of the other,
> who in his turn came to his end by reason of that deed.[182]

And the final line of the story is Gudrun's plaintive lament, 'I did the worst to him I loved the most'.[183]

Notwithstanding the tragic nature of the tale, Morris evokes an image of an earlier, happier age. The two families involved live off the land and all are content in their work, as this description of Gudrun's homestead suggests:

> Upon a day, amid the maids that spun
> Within the bower at Bathstead, sat Gudrun;
> Her father in the firth a-fishing was,
> The while her mother through the meads did pass
> About some homely work.[184]
> (ll.32-6)

Gudrun's lover, Kiartan, like his cousin, Bodli, is a skilled warrior. In addition, however, he is, also, a craftsman:

> Well skilled was he, too, in the craftsman's lore
> To deal with iron mid the stithy's roar
> And many a sword-blade knew his heavy hand.[185]
> (ll. 8-10)

In another of the tales inspired by the Icelandic sagas, 'The Fostering of Aslaug', Heimar, the great lord who fosters Aslaug after the death of her parents (Sigurd and Brynhild), is also renowned for his workmanship. When Heimar closets himself in his smithy whilst he decides how best to protect the infant, Aslaug, his men are not suspicious. They merely assume that Heimar is working hard:

> "For he doth win
> Some work of craftsmanship," said they,
> "And such before on many a day
> Hath been his wont."[186]
> (ll.11-4)

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[182] *C.W.* Vol. V, p.251.
[183] Ibid., p.395.
[184] Ibid., p.252.
[185] Ibid., p.274.
[186] *C.W.* Vol. VI, p.23.

Morris's frequent references to the skills that his characters possess is indicative of his esteem for the traditional crafts which were rapidly becoming obsolete in nineteenth-century Britain. In addition, Morris's detailed descriptions of people happily working on the land evoke a pastoral idyll. In so doing, Morris effectively contrasts the position of people in the pre-industrial age who are engaged in useful work and those of the nineteenth century who have to endure useless toil.

(iv) The importance of nature and the environment

Morris's concern for the environment is apparent in the 'Prologue' where, in the opening lines, the narrator reminds the audience of the industrial urbanisation of his own time and evokes an idealised image of an unpolluted London of the Middle Ages:

> Forget six counties overhung with smoke,
> Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke,
> Forget the spreading of the hideous town;
> Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,
> And dream of London, small white and clean,
> The clear Thames bordered by its garden green;[187]
> (ll. 1-7)

Through his employment of the rhetorical device of autoclesis, Morris draws attention to the consequences of industrialisation. Although he uses the word 'forget' three times,[188] he effectively reminds the audience of the extent of the pollution around

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[187] *C.W.* Vol. III, p.3.

[188] Repetition or anaphora is a device often used in medieval literature, for example, in the pre-penultimate verse of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde:*

> Lo here, of payens corsed olde rites!
> Lo, here, what alle hire goddess may availle!
> Lo here, thise wrecched wordless appetites!
> Lo here, the fyn and guerdoun for travaille
> (ll.1849-1853)
> *Riverside Chaucer*, p.584

London[189] caused by its factories. Morris juxtaposes the idea of the hideous industrial city with its pre-industrial counterpart which was 'small white and clean' with plenty of green spaces[190] and an unpolluted river.

Rivers are often symbolic of nature's bounty, and Morris's later evocation of an unpolluted River Thames in *News from Nowhere* embodies, as David Faldet puts it, 'the environmentalism of Morris's vision.'[191] Conversely, seas can be threatening. Throughout the 'Prologue' the sea is depicted as a place of suffering. The Wanderers' ship 'rolled slowly o'er the leaden sea and grey'[192] and the Wanderers are often directionless, sailing 'helplessly' over 'some watery desert',[193] at the mercy of 'wild and furious'[194] storms. This calls to mind the challenging sea voyages described in the *Illiad* and *Odyssey*[195] but is also redolent of the Old English elegies where the sea not only represents a voyage or pilgrimage but is also a place of torment.[196] This can be seen, for example, in the opening lines of *The Seafarer* translated by Thorpe as follows:

> Mæg Ic me sylfum soðgied wrecan,
> Siþas secgan, hu Ic geswincdagum
> Earfoðhwile oft þrowade.
> Bitre breostceare gebiden hæbbe,
> Gecunnad in coele cearselda fela[197]
> (ll. 1-5)
>
> I of myself can
> a true tale relate,
> *My* fortunes recount,

[189] By 1868, London comprised portions of Essex, Hampshire, Kent, Middlesex, Surrey and Sussex, the six counties to which Morris refers.
[190] In pre-industrial time, green spaces or downs in towns and cities were necessary as pasture for horses.
[191] David Faldet, 'The River at the Heart of Morris's Ecological Thought'. *Writing on the Image,* p.73-84.
[192] *C.W.* Vol. III, p.15.
[193] Ibid., p.23.
[194] Ibid., p.39.
[195] Homer is second on Morris's 1886 list of Best Hundred Books. Along with the Hebrew Bible, *Beowulf* and *The Edda,* 'Homer' appears in the group described by Morris as, 'far more important than any literature. They are in no sense the work of individuals but have grown up from the very hearts of the *people.' Letters,* Vol II, p.515.
[196] The idea that the sea was a place of torment is the opposite of the Victorian perception of the English as a great sea faring nation.
[197] Treharne, p.48

How I, in days of toil,
A time of hardship
Oft suffer'd
Bitter breast-cares
Have endur'd
Prov'd in *the* ship
Strange mishaps many.[198]
(ll. 1-10)

These sentiments of the speaker in *The Seafarer* are echoed by Morris in the 'Prologue'. Rolf begins his tale with the lines:

Masters, I have a tale to tell of woe,
A tale of folly and of wasted life
Hope against hope, the bitter dregs of strife,
Ending, where all things end, in death at last;[199]
(ll. 5-8)

Throughout their journey, the Wanderers visit many lands, all of which offer some respite from the privations of life at sea. These resting places, or havens, are always ones of natural beauty or where people and nature exist in harmony. When the Wanderers first approach land they see:

[…] a belt of grass and then a wall
Of green trees, rising dark against the sky.[200]

They all rush up the beach 'to roll among the fair flowers and the grass'.[201] Wherever the Wanderers pitch their tents the surrounding landscape is always described in detail and nature offers them her bounty in the form of food and shelter:

Once more we took the land, and since we found
That, more than ever, beasts did there abound,
We pitched our camp beside a little stream
But scarcely there of paradise did dream
As heretofore.[202] (ll. 17-21)

[198] Thorpe, *Codex Exoniensis,* p. 306.
[199] *C.W.* Vol. III*,* p.6.
[200] Ibid., p.29.
[201] Ibid., p.29.
[202] Ibid., p.44.

As we have seen, the unnamed city which is the Wanderers' haven is an idyllic place. With its architecturally striking white marble palaces and the 'bubbling conduit'[203] in its main square, Morris evokes an image more classical than mediæval. Morris's description of the city is also redolent of the Old English poem, *The Ruin.* In this poem which, according to Thorpe, 'must have been one of the noblest productions of the Anglo-Saxon muse',[204] the speaker describes the past splendour of a stronghold which is now uninhabited and in decay. In the following lines, the image of this now abandoned township[205] is one of fine architecture and happy community, similar to that described by Morris' in his unnamed city:

> Beotht wæron burgræced, burnsele monige,
> Heah hirngestreon, heresweg micel,
> Meodoheall monig mondreama full-
> Oþþæt þæt onwende wyrd seo swiþe.[206]
> (ll. 21-15)

> [Bright were *the* burgh-dwellings,
> many *its* princely halls,
> high *its* steepled splendour,
> *there was* martial sound great,
> many *a mead-hall,*
> full of human joys,
> until that changed:]

The preservation of ancient buildings was extremely important to Morris for he believed that nineteenth-century architecture had 'no style of its own amidst its wide knowledge of the styles of other centuries'.[207] In 1877 Morris was a founder member of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings which still campaigns for the preservation of old edifices of architectural interest.[208] In a lecture from 1881, 'The

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[203] Ibid., p.4.
[204] Thorpe, p. x.
[205] Believed to be Roman Bath, England.
[206] Treherne, p.84.
[207] William Morris, *The Manifesto of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings* (March 1877). www.spab.org.uk/the-manifesto Accessed 18/11/2013.
[208] Morris and the other founder members of SPAB were opposed to the contemporary custom of restoring ancient buildings which was described by Morris in the Manifesto as 'a strange and fatal idea'. Ancient

Prospects of Architecture in Civilization', Morris argued that the impact architecture had on the landscape was vitally important to humankind:

> A great subject [*architecture*] truly, for it embraces the consideration of the whole external surroundings of the life of man; we cannot escape from it if we would so long as we are part of civilization, for it means the moulding and altering to human needs of the very face of the earth itself, [209]

Morris believed that buildings should be beautiful and well-constructed but should equally enhance the natural landscape not spoil it.

Morris evokes a picture of the symbiosis of man's craft and the natural landscape throughout *The Earthly Paradise.* The town from which the Wanderers originally set sail is, for example, 'a grey-roofed sea-port sloping towards the shore'[210] and this description of one of the cities they encounter suggests that it is possible to construct a sizeable conurbation without destroying the surrounding countryside:

> But certes seemed that city fair enow
> That spread out o'er the well-tilled vale below,
> Though nowise built like such as we had seen;
> Walled with white walls it was, and gardens green
> Were set between the houses everywhere;[211]
> (ll. 28-32)

The phrase 'like such as we had seen' invites a comparison between this city and a nineteenth-century industrial metropolis.

Morris often makes the connection between the camaraderie within the communal hall and the symbiosis between manmade structures and nature. The narrator introduces one of the stories with the following lines:

> When April-tide was melting into May,
> Within a hall that midst the gardens lay

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buildings, Morris believed, should not be altered if they become unfit for any current purpose but rather should be treated as 'monuments to a bygone art, created by bygone manners that modern art cannot meddle with without destroying.' www.spab.org.uk/the-manifesto Accessed 18/11/2013.

[209] *C.W.* Vol. XXII, p.119.

[210] *C.W.* Vol III, p.7.

[211] Ibid., p.54.

These elders met, and having feasted well,
The time came round the wonted tale to tell.[212]
(ll.1-4)

Morris foregrounds the importance of the natural environment to humans throughout *The Earthly Paradise.* At the beginning of 'Atalanta's Race', for example, Morris introduces the hero, Milanion, who is hunting in Arcadian woods. As he leaves this idyllic spot which was peaceful apart from the natural 'day-long noises of the wood',[213] Milanion enters a land where people and nature exist in harmony; the landscape is enhanced by human's work not destroyed:

And o'er green meads and new-turned furrows brown
Beheld the gleaming of King Schoeneus' town[214]
(ll. 6-7)

The people of this land are happily engaged in useful work:

And on each side
The folk were busy on the teeming land,
And man and maid from the brown furrows cried,
Or midst the newly-blossomed vines did stand,[215]
(ll. 8-11)

'Atalanta's Race' is imbued with depictions of unspoilt landscapes. The natural world is important to Milanion's well-being; every description of the hero is related to the surrounding landscape and circadian rhythms of the earth:

But when the waves had touched the marble base,
And steps the fish swim over twice a-day,
The dawn beheld him sunken in his place
Upon the floor; and sleeping there he lay,
Not heeding aught the little jets of spray
The roughened sea brought nigh, across him cast,
For as one dead all thought from him had passed.[216]
(ll. 22-8)

[212] *C.W.* Vol.III, p.240.
[213] Ibid., p.85.
[214] Ibid., p.86.
[215] Ibid., p. 86.
[216] *C.W.* Vol. III, p. 98.

Milanion's reference to the 'golden age' (in his supplication to Venus) reminds the audience of the pre-industrial age, evoked earlier in the 'Prologue', when human beings lived in harmony with nature, not alienated from it. This idea of a simpler and better past is echoed by one of the Wanderers (Rolf) as he begins his tale. They are free men 'not galled by any yolk' and are content without material wealth:

> Yet as now indeed
> Few have much wealth, few are in utter need[217]
> (ll.3-4)

The belief than humankind and nature should live in symbiosis is a recurring theme throughout *The Earthly Paradise.* This harmony is emphasised by the matching of the stories with the seasons of the year. Between the tale-telling of the protagonists, the narrator often reminds the audience of the happy state of the Wanderers and Elders as they live in harmony with nature and one another:

> And now betwixt tulip beds they went
> Unto the hall, and thoughts of days long spent
> Gathered about them, as some blossom's smell
> Until their hearts familiar tales did tell.
> (ll.9-12)[218]

These four short lines evoke the interaction of humankind and nature. The tulips are in 'beds', so they are cultivated rather than growing wild, and are in such close proximity to the communal hall that their scent is identifiable. In addition, Morris's reference to the 'blossom's smell' and the effect it has on the Wanderers' reminiscences, underscores the importance of nature to human beings. The ability to smell is linked to memory,[219] hence, without the scents of nature, people's ability to recollect the past would be impaired.

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[217] Ibid., p.106.
[218] *C.W.* Vol. IV, p.75
[219] The olfactory nerve is situated close to the amygdala and the hippocampus, the areas of the human brain associated with, respectively, emotion and memory.

The harmony between humankind and nature on the island that becomes the Wanderers' home is juxtaposed with the alienation from nature in one of the July tales, 'The Watching of the Falcon'. As with many fables the moral of this story is the destructive nature of people's desire for material wealth. A certain king who had 'boundless'[220] riches goes on a foolish quest to acquire even more. The castle in which the king meets his fate is described in the following lines:

> Midmost there
> Rose up a stronghold, built four-square,
> Upon a flowery grassy mound,
> The moat and high wall ran around.
> (ll.16-19)[221]

The use of the word 'stronghold' suggests that the castle dominates and does not enhance the surrounding landscape. (Morris, of course, believed that architecture should enhance the natural world and not mar it.) This reading is further supported by the fact that it was Spring and outside the castle:

> Things were as in the April-tide
> And daffodils and cowslips grew[222]
> (ll.25-6)

Inside the stronghold, however, the garden is blossoming in a rather unnatural manner:

> Within the bounds of that sweet close
> Was trellised the bewildering rose;
> There was the lily over-sweet
> And starry pinks for garlands meet;
> And apricots hung on the wall,
> And midst the flowers did peaches fall,
> And nought had blemish there or spot
> For in that place decay was not.[223]
> (ll.28-35)

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[220] *C.W.* Vol. IV, p.165.
[221] Ibid., p.166.
[222] Ibid., p.166.
[223] Ibid., p.166.

Within the castle the roses, lilies and dianthus (pinks) are all in flower even though it is Spring and they naturally bloom in summer. At the same time, autumn fruits are ripening without blemish despite the fact that soft fruits, such as apricots and peaches, are notoriously difficult to grow without some spotting on the skin. The preternatural state of this garden is underscored by the description of the lily, a toxic plant, as 'over-sweet'. This depiction not only emphasises the artificial nature of the garden but also evokes the sickly-sweet scent that lilies emit as they decay. Interestingly, Morris's portrayal of this perverse garden with its hot-house flowers, presages the decadence of the Aesthetic Movement of the second half of the nineteenth century. In the opening lines of Oscar Wilde's novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890),[224] for example, spring lilacs and summer roses bloom in profusion, along with the colourful, yet toxic, laburnum:

> The studio was filled with the rich odour of roses, and when the light summer wind stirred amidst the trees of the garden, there came through the open door the heavy scent of the lilac, or the more delicate perfume of the pink-flowering thorn. […] Lord Henry Wotton could just catch the gleam of the honey-sweet and honey-coloured blossoms of a laburnum, whose tremulous branches seemed hardly able to bear the burden of a beauty so flamelike as theirs;[225]

It is worth restating here that, although Morris in his design work in particular, is often associated with the Aesthetic Movement, he, himself, was contemptuous of the movement and its motto, Art for Art's sake. The belief that art should only be available to a small élite was anathema to Morris, who thought that art was not only

[224] Wilde was influenced by Morris whom he described in his poem *The Garden of Eros* as 'our sweet and simple Chaucer's child'. Morris's opinion of Wilde was rather more equivocal. After they first met in 1881, Morris wrote to Jane, 'I must admit that as the devil is painted blacker than he is, so it fares with O.W., not but what he is an ass: but he certainly is & clever too.' (*Letters* Vol II, p.38.) Morris would have disagreed with Wilde's assertion in the Preface to his novella*: '*No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style.' *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Guild Publishing, 1980), p. ix.

[225] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Guild Publishing, 1980), p.1.

'Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting, in the narrow sense of those words'[226] but also included what he termed the 'Decorative Arts': crafts such as joinery, pottery, weaving and glass-making. In his lecture, 'The Lesser Arts' (1877), Morris emphasised the centrality of all decorative arts and crafts to the well-being of a community as a whole:

> These arts [...] are part of a great system invented for the expression of man's delight in beauty: all peoples and times have used them; they have been the joy of free nations, and the solace of oppressed nations; [...]best of all, they are the sweeteners of human labour, both to the handicraftsman, whose life is spent working in them, and to people in general who are influenced by the sight of them [...] they make our toil happy, our rest fruitful.[227]

This practical, egalitarian notion of art was completely opposed to the élitist ethos of the Aesthetic Movement. In relation to this, William Gaunt in *The Aesthetic Adventure* (1945) concludes that:

> The 'aesthetic man' recognised no duties, pursued no interests, save those of art [and] was indifferent to religion, morality, education, political principle or social improvement […] Thus the aesthetic movement was fundamentally selfish. […] William Morris, believing that everyone had the capacity of an artist, that all happy work was a form of art, could not but be antagonistic to the mystic cult of an irresponsible 'genius'.[228]

To return to Morris's tale, however, the fortress in 'The Watching of the Falcon' turns out to be supernatural as its subjugation of the natural world implies. This is juxtaposed with the image of the land that the foolish king had left, one where man and nature existed in harmony:

> There hath the reaper a full hand,
> While in the orchard hangs aloft
> The purple fig, a-growing soft;
> And fair trellised vine-bunches
> Are swung across the high elm-trees;
> And in the rivers the great fish play,
> While over them pass day by day

[226] *C.W.* Vol. XXII, p.4
[227] Ibid., p.8
[228] William Gaunt, *The Aesthetic Adventure* (Oxford: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1945), p.215.

The laden barges to their place.
There maidens are straight and fair of face,
And men are stout of husbandry,
And all is well as it can be.[229]
(ll. 16-26)

These lines evoke the idyllic image of a busy and happy community living in close association with nature. Later in the same tale, one of the Fay Ladies makes adverse comments on the greed and materialistic nature of men:

"Better it were that men should live
As beasts and take what earth can give,
The air, the warm sun and the grass,
Until unto the earth they pass,
And gain perchance nought worse than rest
Than that not knowing what is best
For sons of men, they needs must thirst
For what shall make their lives accurst".[230]
(ll.21-7)

Here, she is advocating one of the main tenets of eco-socialism: humans require a non-material interaction with nature. An individual's mental as well as physical well-being is dependent on the quality of the surrounding environment and not on the acquisition of material possessions.

Throughout *The Earthly Paradise,* whatever the original source of the tale, Morris consistently evokes idealised images of pre-industrial lands. The first of the two August tales, 'Pygmalion and the Image', is a case in point. It is based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and is the legend of the sculptor who fell in love with his own creation. With the help of the goddess Venus, the statue comes alive and Pygmalion marries her. Before the Elder begins this classic tale, the narrator evokes an image of an unspoilt, pastoral English landscape:

Across the gap made by our English hinds
Amidst the Roman's handiwork, behold

[229] *C.W.* Vol IV, p.161.
[230] Ibid., p. 173.

Far off the long-roofed church; the shepherd binds
The withy round the hurdles of his fold
Down in the foss the river fed of old[231]
(ll. 1-5)

The audience is repeatedly reminded of the contented state of the Wanderers because they are now living in a land where people and nature are interdependent. As they wait to hear an autumn tale, the Wanderers watch the fruits of nature being harvested:

Now came fulfilment of the year's desire,
The tall wheat, coloured by the August fire
Grew heavy-headed,[232]
(ll. 1-3)

The Wanderers are content; they have found a safe haven and nature is bountiful:

August had not gone by, though now was stored
In the sweet smelling granaries all the hoard
Of golden corn; the land had made her gain,
And winter should howl round her doors in vain.[233]
(ll. 1-4)

Morris's concern about the environmental consequences of manufacturing units is implied throughout the poem. One of the Wanderers, Rolf, for example, evokes the vision of the unspoiled landscape and craftsmanship of pre-industrial England in his introduction to 'The Proud King':

I, who have seen
So many lands, and midst such marvels been,
Clearer than these abodes of outland men
Can see above the green and unburnt fen
The little houses of an English town
Cross-timbered, thatched with fen-reeds coarse and brown,
And high o'er these, three gables, great and fair,
That slender rods of columns do upbear
Over minster doors, and imagery
Of kings, and flowers no summer field doth see,
Wrought on those gables.[234] (ll.1-11)

[231] *C.W.* Vol. IV, p.187.
[232] Ibid., p.188.
[233] Ibid., p.209.
[234] *C.W.* Vol. III, p.241.

By evoking this idealised picture of a mediaeval town which comprised simple houses and magnificent churches, Morris invites a comparison with the rapidly changing English landscape of his own day. In the nineteenth century, cities were rapidly expanding into the surrounding countryside as ugly, utilitarian houses were being built in uniform rows in order to provide accommodation (wretched, according to Morris)[235] for the increasing number of factory workers.

Morris believed that the surrounding environment, whether natural or man-made, is crucial to an individual's well-being, both physical and psychological. In 1883, he, in fact, argued that commerce destroyed mental health by:

> […] the reckless destruction of the natural beauty of the earth, which compels the great mass of population, in this country at least, to live amidst ugliness and squalor so revolting and disgusting that we could not bear it unless habit had made us used to it; that is to say, unless we were far advanced on the road towards losing some of the highest and happiest qualities which have been given to men.[236]

It was not, however, until later in his life that he explicitly articulated this view. Nevertheless Morris's disquiet about the detrimental effects industrialisation had on nature and the environment can be discerned in *The Earthly Paradise.*

(v) The folly of materialism

The 'Prologue' contains many references to Morris's anxiety about the problems of his time. In the following extract, for example, it is easy to discern Morris's opposition to British imperialism which, in his opinion, inevitably led to the exploitation of the colonised people:

> Now of these foresters, we learned that they,
> Hemmed by the woods, went seldom a long way

[235] *Useful Work versus Useless Toil* www.anglocatholicesocialism.org/work Accessed 16/12/2013.
[236] *C.W.* Vol XXIII, p.157.

> From where we saw them, and no boat they had,
> Nor much of other people good or bad
> They knew, and ever had they little war:
> But now and then a folk would come from far
> In ships like ours, and for their gold
> Would give them goods; [237]
>
> (ll. 6-13)

These lines spoken by Rolf, one of the Wanderers, depict a peaceful race, living in harmony with nature that is conquered by various nations, greedy for their gold. The people of the city in which the Wanderers are given sanctuary have no such ambitions. One of the City Elders, for instance, declares that:

> Therefore our ships are now content to sail,
> About these happy islands that we know.[238]
>
> (ll.3-4)

The Wanderers are worn out by their quest, as the narrator's description of them demonstrates:

> The men themselves are shrivelled, bent and grey;
> And as they lean with pain upon their spears
> Their brows seem furrowed deep with more than years;
> For sorrow dulls their heavy sunken eyes;
> Bent are they less with time than miseries.[239]
>
> (ll. 33-37)

This is in sharp contrast to the appearance of the City Elders who, although of advanced years,[240] are clad in 'most fair attire' and look at the Wanderers 'through kindly eyes'.[241]

During their quest, the Wanderers experience brief periods of contentment living in harmony with nature. These are all destroyed, however, by human

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[237] *C.W.* Vol. III, p.38.
[238] Ibid., p.6.
[239] Ibid., p.4.
[240] This presages Morris's depiction of the characters in his novella, *News from Nowhere* (1890) who all keep 'good looks'. When Will Guest estimated the age of a pretty young woman with 'skin as smooth ivory' as twenty, he was told that she was forty-two, middle-aged in Victorian times. (*News from Nowhere,* p. 41).
[241] *C.W.* Vol. III, p.5.

intervention. The first island they visit turns out to be inhabited by the remnants of a civilisation all but eradicated by the worship of gold. As they try to find their way, the Wanderers have to cross terrain which has been destroyed by other people. They initially have to penetrate a 'thick black wood' [242] before climbing a 'scarped white hill' where they discover a shrine to gold:

> […]Therein could we see,
> Amidst the gloom by peering steadily,
> An altar of rough stones, and over it
> We saw a god of yellow metal sit,
> (ll.18-21)
> […]Withal there hung
> Against the wall men's bodies brown and dry,
> Which gaudy rags of raiments wretchedly
> Did wrap about, and all their heads were wreathed
> With golden chaplets;[243]
> (ll.23-7)

This description prefigures Morris's later writings on wealth. In a lecture first delivered in March 1883 Morris argued that real wealth was of two kinds: 'things good and necessary for the body, and things good and necessary for the mind.'[244] Morris contended that the competitive commerce of his era was depriving people of both, as he argued:

> […] the first of these kinds of real wealth she [Commerce][245] largely wastes, the second she largely destroys. She wastes the first by unjust and ill-managed distribution of the power of acquiring wealth, […]; by urging people to reckless multiplication of their kind, and by gathering population into unmanageable aggregations to satisfy her ruthless greed, without the least thought of their welfare.[246]

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[242] Ibid., p.29.
[243] Ibid., p.32.
[244] *C.W.* Vol. XXIII, p.157.
[245] Morris's allegorical meaning and the explanation of the word 'Commerce' is clearly influenced by the morality plays and religious poetry of the Middle Ages. It is easy to draw a comparison between Goods in *Everyman* and Lady Meed in *Piers Plowman* and, of course, the texts have a didactic purpose in common. Langland's poem appears on Morris's list of One Hundred Best Books and a copy of the 1773 volume by Thomas Hopkins, Samuel Leacroft and Daniel Prince, *The origins of the English drama: illustrated in its various species, viz. mystery, morality, tragedy and comedy, by specimens from our earliest writers,* is in the Bodleian Library. According to J.A. George, there is, then, 'every likelihood' that Morris had read *Everyman* whilst an undergraduate at Oxford. *JWMS Vol XX No 2.* (Summer 2013), pp.16-29. Later in 1887, Morris was to write his own morality play or socialist interlude; *The Tables Turned; or, Nupkins Awakened.*
[246] *C.W.* Vol XXIII, p.157.

The analogy is obvious. In their reckless pursuit of gold and riches, the people of this land have destroyed the environment and themselves. They may have golden crowns but they are brown and dry, physically and spiritually.

Throughout the poem, Morris creates Romantic, bucolic images to express the happiness of mankind, in the 'The Love of Alcestis', for example. Essentially it is the story of self-sacrifice; Alcestis gives up her life so that her husband, King Ademetus, might live. Set in ancient Thessaly ruled by Ademetus, it is, nevertheless, a land whose inhabitants are happy:

> In those old simple days, before men went
> To gather unseen harm and discontent,
> Along with all the alien merchandise
> That rich folk need, too restless to be wise.[247]
> (ll.24-7)

Morris's reference to 'alien merchandise' and 'restless' 'rich folk' is clearly an indictment of Victorian capitalism which produced useless, shoddy goods that people did not need.

It should also be noted that many of the tales in *The Earthly Paradise* have an allegorical meaning. In 'The Death of Paris', for example, Paris deserts Œnone (Nature) in pursuit of riches and material wealth personified by Helen. He does not find happiness and, regretting his decision, returns to Œnone. His interaction with Œnone is always in an idyllic locus:

> Him seemed he lingered there, then stepped adown
> With troubled heart into the soft green place,
> And up the eastmost of the beech-slopes brown
> He turned about a lovesome, anxious face,
> And stood to listen for a little space
> If any came, but nought he seemed to hear
> Save the brook's babble, and the beech leaves' stir[248] (ll. 22-8)

[247] *C.W.* Vol. IV, p.89.
[248] *C.W.* Vol. V., p.9.

Paris has destroyed Œnone by his betrayal and, consequently, has destroyed himself as well. There are signs of hope, however, in some of Morris's tales. In 'The Man Born to be King', for example, the king who plotted to kill Michael eventually realises the error of his ways and regrets his past life spent in the pursuit of riches and power:

> How many an hour might I have been
> Right merry in the gardens green;
> How many a glorious day had I
> Made happy with some victory;
> What bright renown my deeds have won;
> What blessings would have made me glad;
> What little burdens had I had,
> What calmness in the hope of praise,
> What joy of well-accomplished days,
> If I had let these things alone;
> Nor sought to sit upon my throne
> Like God between the cherubim.[249]
>
> (ll.30-41)

Morris's tale, like the legend that inspired it, is ultimately a parable about the evils of pursuing riches and power. Just as the king regrets all the time he wasted in pursuit of material gains which no longer seem important so, too, do Morris's Wanderers lament the years they devoted to their futile quest:

> They mused on these things, masking with a smile
> The vain regrets that in their hearts arose,[250]
>
> (ll.18-9)

The folly of human beings' materialism is a recurring theme throughout *The Earthly Paradise,* in fact. In the ode to June, for example, Morris evokes the now familiar image of pre-industrial rural England as a reminder of what was being lost in the Victorian period:

> What better place than this then could we find

[249] *C.W.* Vol. III, p.166.
[250] Ibid., p.168.

By this sweet stream that knows not of the sea,
That guesses not the city's misery,
This little stream whose hamlets scarce have names,
This far-off, lonely mother of the Thames?[251]
(ll. 10-4)

Morris retreats into the past to veil his criticism of contemporary life in which, he believed, humans exploited nature and one another in pursuit of material gains.

The folly of questing for material wealth is also evident in 'The Writing on the Image'. In this story, a scholar manages to decipher the meaning of the words carved on an image from ancient Rome. He is, however, motivated by greed rather than the desire for knowledge. Before he enters the treasure cave he actually admits to his ambition for wealth and status:

Then thought he: If I come alive
From out this place well shall I thrive,
For I may look her certainly
The treasures of a king to see,
A mightier man than men are now.
So in a few days what men shall know
The needy Scholar, seeing me
Great in the place where great men be,
The richest man in all the land?[252]
(ll.4-12)

The Scholar marvels at the richly dressed and well preserved corpses that he finds in the cave, but despite his fear he greedily fills his bag with 'rich things'.[253] As he leaves, he is distracted by the sight of a large green (symbolic of envy) stone. He stops to pick up the gem as he thinks that it will make him rich and powerful:

Yet thou
Certes, would make me rich enow,
That verily with thee I might
Wage one half of the world to fight
The other half of it, and I
The lord of all the world might die;
I will not leave thee.[254] (ll.19-25)

[251] *C.W.* Vol. IV, p.87.
[252] Ibid., p.79.
[253] Ibid., p.83.
[254] *C.W.* Vol. IV, p.83.

The Scholar, thanks to his own avarice, is trapped in the cave and never seen again. It is significant that the protagonist of this story is a scholar. He does not put his great learning to good use, however, but rather for his own selfish ends. He alone deciphers the riddle on the image but, had he shared his knowledge with others, then the tale would have had a very different outcome. And the moral of this tale is not lost on Morris's protagonists:

> They praised the tale, and for a while they talked
> Of other tales of treasure-seekers balked
> And shame and loss for men insatiate stored,
> Nitocris' tomb, the Niblungs' fatal hoard,
> The serpent-guarded treasures of the dead;[255]
> (ll.23-7)

(IV) Conclusion

The Earthly Paradise, the epic poem that firmly established Morris's reputation as a poet was published, and largely written, during a very difficult period of Morris's life. 'The Prologue' is, in effect, his personal elegy and is heavily influenced by some of the poetry of the *Exeter Book*. Through his adaptation of the legends of the past and his depiction of the unspoiled landscape of pre-industrial lands, Morris offers a critique of Victorian capitalism. *The Earthly Paradise* is, however, not mere nostalgic escapism as, according to Marcus Waithe, '[Morris's] invocation of a 'medieval' outlook in the fields of architecture and literature served to establish an exemplary approach to the problems of poverty and alienation from an age bereft of equivalent models.'[256]

[255] Ibid., p.85.
[256] Marcus Waithe, *William Morris's Utopia of Strangers: Victorian Medievalism and the Ideal of Hospitality* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), p.69.

The ideal communities that Morris evoke in this epic poem offer alternatives to a society based on alienation, commercial exploitation and ecological destruction. These model societies could best be described as eco-social: non-hierarchical communities in which neither the environment nor people, especially women, are exploited and where all people have their fair share of rewarding labour and are able to enjoy their surroundings, whether natural or man-made. Furthermore, if goods were produced on the basis of need, rather than the desire for material possessions then natural resources would not be wasted and capitalism, with its profit imperative would come to an end. Work would consequently become a pleasure rather than a punishment and people would work for personal fulfilment as well as for the good of the community.

Chapter Four
Morris's Icelandic Period (1871-1876)

(I) Introduction

The subject of this final chapter is Morris's last long poem, *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs* (1876)[1] which was inspired by the 'most glorious of stories',[2] the Icelandic *Völsunga Saga.*[3] The latter was written in the thirteenth century by an unknown author who based his epic on stories found in much older Norse poetry. The saga is an epic tale of jealousy, betrayal, unrequited love and vengeance that recounts the mythical deeds of the dragon-slaying hero, Sigurd, who acquires the great treasure known as the Rhinegold but becomes tragically entangled in a love triangle involving a supernatural woman (who turns out to be a Valkyrie). Morris's poeticising of this saga was a direct response to the adverse effects that industrialisation and the capitalism that engendered it had on both Victorian society and the environment. Accordingly, a close reading of *Sigurd*, later in this chapter, shall help to reveal much of Morris's eco-social thought in relation to these concerns.

Morris was, perhaps, attracted to the *Völsunga Saga* as, like other Icelandic sagas, it was the product of a community, rather than an individual. The sagas had

[1] According to his daughter, this poem, the 'darling of his heart', was begun by Morris in October 1875 and 'finished and out by November 1876, having the imprint of 1877.' *C.W.* Vol XII, p. xj. Hereafter, *Sigurd.*

[2] *Letters*, Vol. 1, p.344.

[3] The *Völsunga Saga* exists in only one composite mediaeval manuscript (Royal Library of Denmark Ny kgl.saml. 1824b 4to.) dated to about 1400, although it is a copy of much older originals. In addition, there are versions from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries which all derive, directly or indirectly, from the mediaeval manuscript, though they provide readings of varying degrees of usefulness where the original is illegible as a result of deterioration. According to Jesse L. Byock, significant deterioration occurred subsequent to the issue of Magnus Olsen's *Völsunga Saga ok Ragnars saga loðbrókar* (Copenhagen 1906-1908). A number of passages which were legible in Olsen's day, unfortunately, can no longer be read. Jesse L. Byock, *The Saga of the Völsungs* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p.31.

been passed on orally for centuries and, according to Gísli Sigurdson, were 'added to and changed by each generation, and […] constantly took on the shape of the present while preserving material that went back to the mists of antiquity.'[4] The *Völsunga Saga* with its tales of ancient heroes, combined with references to actual historical events,[5] is undoubtedly a national epic. The heroic ideals reflected in it, (personal honour, for example), were those valued by the Icelandic people. Early Icelanders may have lacked material wealth but, according to Sigurdsson, they 'never wavered in the unconditional moral demand of choosing death with honour over life with shame.'[6] Furthermore, mediaeval Icelanders were, Morris believed, 'the best tale-tellers whom the world has ever bred'.[7] It is significant, then, that Morris's poem inspired by the *Völsunga Saga* was, according to his daughter, the one he wished to be remembered by:

> It is the central work of my father's life, his last long and important poem, and in sustained poetic inspiration culminates – and closes. It is the work that […] he held most highly and wished to be remembered by. All his Icelandic study and travel, all his feeling for the North, led up to this, and his satisfaction with it did not waver or change to the last.[8]

Prior to composing *Sigurd,* Morris studied the language and literature of mediaeval Iceland with Eiríkur Magnússon, the theologian and linguist,[9] whom Morris met in the autumn of 1868 whilst the poet was still working on *The Earthly Paradise.* The two men subsequently went on to publish several translations of the

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[4] Gísli Sigurdsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition: A Discourse on Method* trans. Nicholas Jones. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 5.

[5] The saga refers to events which took place during the European Migration Period (400-700 A.D.) and incorporates several characters from that time. Atli for example, is the historic Attila the Hun, ruler of the Hunic empire from 434 to 453 AD.

[6] Sigurdsson, p.2.

[7] William Morris, 'The Early Literature of the North-Iceland'. *The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris,* ed. Eugene LeMire (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), p.198.

[8] *C.W.* Vol XII, p.xxiij.

[9] Born in East Iceland, Eiríkur Magnússon (1833-1913) was the son of a poor parson. When he was sixteen he was sent to college (Latínuskóli) in Reykjavik. He graduated from there in 1856 and from the School of Theology (Prestaskóli) in 1859. He never took holy orders, however, and came to Great Britain in 1862 at the invitation of Isaac Sharpe on behalf of the British and Foreign Bible Society, for whom he was to work on a new Icelandic translation of the Bible.

Icelandic Sagas, including *Grettis Saga: The Story of Grettir The Strong* (1869), *Völsung Saga* (1870) and *Three Northern Love Stories and Other Tales* (1875).[10] Morris also visited Iceland twice (in the summers of 1871 and 1873), and both of these journeys, especially the first one, had a profound effect on him. This is illustrated in J.W. Mackail's biography of Morris, where Mackail writes that:

> The journey through Iceland in the summer of 1871 had, before and after its occurrence, an importance in Morris's life which can hardly be over-estimated and which, even to those who knew him well, was not wholly intelligible.[11]

Whilst in Iceland, Morris kept a diary which was published posthumously.[12] This journal is a curious mixture of the detailed minutiae of his travels and vivid descriptions of the landscape. Though he wrote to his wife that there was 'no use trying to describe'[13] his first sight of Iceland, he recorded in his journal that it was:

> [...] a terrible shore indeed: a great mass of dark grey mountains worked into pyramids and shelves, looking as if they had been built and half-ruined; they were striped with snow high up, and wreaths of cloud dragged across them here and there, and above them there were two peaks and a jagged ridge of pure white snow[14]

The existence of this account of his trips to Iceland is unusual, as, apart from sporadic, routine records of work and the brief period of his Socialist diaries in 1887, Morris kept no regular journal. The introspective nature of the Icelandic diaries is equally revealing, and would appear to support the belief that Morris found it much

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[10] This volume contains *The Story of Gunnlaug the Wormtongue and Raven the Skald; The Story of Frithiof the Bold; The Story of Viglund the Fair; The Tale of Hogi and Hedinn; The Tale of Roi the Fool* and *The Tale of Thorstein the Staff- Smitten.*

[11] Mackail, p. 258.

[12] *C.W.* Vol. VIII, 1911.

[13] *Letters*.Vol. 1, p. 141. This letter illustrates the emotional distance between Morris and Jane, who was by then Rossetti's lover. In 1871, prior to leaving for Iceland, Morris took the lease of Kelmscott Manor and left Rossetti (the joint leasee) and Jane together. This *ménage a trois* seems an unorthodox arrangement by both Victorian and modern day standards, but it appears to have been Morris's stoical way of dealing with a very painful situation.

[14] *William Morris: Icelandic Journals with an Introduction by Magnus Magnusson and a Foreword by Fiona MacCarthy* (London: Mare's Nest Publishing, 1996), p.14.

easier to express his thoughts through the medium of poetry, or in the privacy of a diary. His journal entry for 11 July 1871, for example, begins:

> I have often noticed in one's expeditions how hard it is to explain to one's friends afterwards why such and such a day was particularly delightful, or give them any impression of one's pleasure, and such a trouble besets me now about the past day.[15]

The Icelandic diaries also provide great insight into Morris's thoughts during this period. As a consequence, reference will continue to be made to them throughout this chapter, as well as to *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs* (1876),[16] the epic poem which was inspired by Morris's enthusiastic engagement with Iceland and its literature.

(II) Sources and Influences

When he met Magnússon in 1868, Morris was already familiar with some Old Norse literature. Whilst a student at Oxford, Morris read Benjamin Thorpe's *Northern Mythology* (1851), Paul-Henri Mallet's *Northern Antiquities (*1770)[17] and Sir Walter Scott's *Abstract on the Eyrbyggja Saga.*[18] It is hardly surprising then that several of Morris's contributions to *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*[19] in 1856, 'Lindenburg Pool' for example, were inspired by Old Norse literature. Translations of Icelandic literature were available and, according to his daughter, May, Morris had read A.S. Cottle's 1796 translation of *The Poetic Edda*, and Sir George Webbe

[15] *Icelandic Journals,* p.9.
[16] Hereafter, *Sigurd.*
[17] Republished in 1848.
[18] Scott's *An Abstract of the Eyrbiggia-Saga* was published in *Illustrations of Northern Antiquities* eds. E. Weber and R. Jamieson (Edinburgh, 1814). Morris's and Magnusson's translation of the *Eyrbiggia Saga* came out in 1892.
[19] See Chapter One of this thesis.

Dasent's[20] rendering of *The Prose or Younger Edda* (1842),[21] and the *Gisla Saga* (1866). According to Andrew Wawn,[22] however, it was through Dasent's *The Story of Burnt Njal* (1861) that many Victorian readers made their first acquaintance with specifically Icelandic, as opposed to Scandinavian, Old Norse literature. At this juncture, this distinction perhaps requires further explanation. As stated by Margaret Clunies Ross, 'in linguistic terms Old Norse most frequently refers to the West Scandinavian branch of the Scandinavian languages and cultures, that is, Norwegian, Icelandic, Faroese and the now defunct Orkney and Shetland Norn.'[23] Iceland was first settled in the ninth century by Viking colonists, mostly from Norway, and it developed its own language from Norwegian. Unlike other colonies of the Norwegian diaspora, however, Iceland quickly acquired a rich, vernacular literature, of which the sagas are a major part. Derived from the Old Norse verb *segja,* meaning 'to say or to tell', the word 'saga' literally means 'something said'. Clunies Ross elucidates as follows:

> [The saga] was a textual form that was primarily a narrative in the vernacular, probably taking formal shape (though not necessarily invariant formal shape) in oral transmission by at least the early twelfth century; it was about people, mostly Norse people and their doings, whether these were individuals or groups; it often contained poetry, some of which could sometimes be invented by the composer of the saga, whose name was only rarely transmitted alongside the saga itself; it occupied a grey area between fact and fiction, springing in variable part from known events, but it was also shaped by the creating imagination of the composers. The relationship between any saga and the events and persons that gave it grounds for being was fluid. For the most part it was orally performed and had a high entertainment value.[24]

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[20] George Webbe Dasent (1817-1896) studied at Oxford and was appointed as Professor of English Language and Literature at King's College London in 1853.

[21] Copies of Dasent's *Younger Edda* and Cottle's *Poetic Edda* were in the Bodleian Library when Morris was at Oxford so it is likely that he read them at that time.

[22] Andrew Wawn, *The Vikings and The Victorians: Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000), p.142.

[23] Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Cambridge Introduction to The Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 13.

[24] Clunies Ross, p.23.

Though sagas were initially transmitted orally, they began to be written down in the twelfth century.[25] Many of the earliest manuscripts no longer exist but, fortunately, there are surviving versions of the sagas dating from a much later period. A great deal of what is known today of these texts is due to the Icelander Árni Magnússon (1663-1730),[26] who, in addition to his collecting and preservation of mediaeval manuscripts, assisted Thomas Bartholin (1659-1690), the Royal Antiquarian of Denmark, with his histories of Northern culture and religion, *Antiqvitatum danicarum de causis contempt a danis adhuc gentilibus mortis libri tres (Three books of Danish antiquities concerning the causes of the contempt of death hitherto felt by the Danish peoples),*[27] which were published in 1689. In addition, Magnússon translated numerous sagas from Icelandic for Bartholin and, as a consequence,many Europeans were introduced to Icelandic literature for the first time.[28]

The earliest translation of an Icelandic saga into English was, however, James Johnstone's 1780-2 version of *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar (The Saga of King Hákon Hákonarson),*[29] and there subsequently followed a substantial increase in the study of Old Norse and Icelandic language and literature by antiquarians. The interest in the sagas was contemporaneous with the growth in Anglo-Saxon[30] scholarship, and both were engendered by the desire to explore Britain's Old

[25] Following Iceland's conversion to Christianity in 1000 A.D. the Church's practice of keeping written records began to be assimilated by the island's scholars and law-makers. Many Icelanders were, however, still illiterate by the end of the Middle Ages so oral transmission of the sagas continued.

[26] Árni Magnússon was born in West Iceland and educated at the Grammar School at Skálholt. He then went on to study at the University of Copenhagen and, after taking his degree, he occupied himself with research and the collecting of manuscripts. He became a professor at the university but then returned to Iceland where he remained for ten years as plenipotentiary of the Danish king. Magnússon was affluent and during that period in Iceland (1703-1713) was able to acquire virtually all the mediaeval manuscripts that were not already in public collections. Magnússon bequeathed his collection to the University of Copenhagen and, in 1961, the Danish government finally agreed to hand over a substantial number of the Arnamagnaean Collection to the University of Iceland.

[27] A first edition of these volumes was in the Bodleian whilst Morris was at Oxford.

[28] Árni Magnússon's translations were, however, in Latin and therefore only intelligible to an élite audience.

[29] This saga from the *Konungasogur (Kings' Sagas),* is one of the relatively few attributed to a named author, Sturla þórðarson d. 1284. Hákon was the king of Norway when Iceland became its dependency in 1262-1264.

[30] See Chapter Three of this thesis.

Northern, as opposed to Classical, Philology. On this subject, Matthew Driscoll has stated that many intellectuals, 'weary of the over-refined society of their times, sought in Old Norse literature a kind of wildness, a world uncontaminated by European civilisation.'[31] The following extract from the *Edinburgh Review* in 1828 illustrates Driscoll's point:

> Though the mythology of the Edda, and the exploits of the Sagas, have been replaced in our nurseries, and our fancy, by the softer dreams of our Southern invaders, we may nevertheless, hail an occasional interview with the grim heroes of Valhalla, with feelings not altogether alien to their grandeur and their gloom.[32]

This interest in the northern sagas continued into the Victorian age, but it was at a much later stage that Old Norse and Icelandic language and literature achieved the same academic status as Anglo-Saxon studies. The first Icelandic dictionary was not published until 1874,[33] over two hundred years after the first Anglo Saxon lexicon[34] and, according to Wawn, when Eiríkur Magnússon took up the post of assistant librarian at the University of Cambridge in 1871, 'Old Icelandic interests and expertise carried none of the unchallenged prestige of Graeco-Roman scholarship.'[35] Despite Magnússon's efforts to promote the study of Old Icelandic language and literature, however, these subjects did not become part of the Cambridge syllabus until 1891.[36] There were, nevertheless, many who were keen to compare the

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[31] Matthew James Driscoll, *The Unwashed Children of Eve: The Production, Dissemination and Reception of Popular Literature in Post-Reformation Iceland* (Endfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1997), p. 31.

[32] Quoted in Andrew Wawn; 'The Cult of Stalwart Frith-thjof in Victorian Britain. ' *Northern Antiquity :The Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga,* ed. Andrew Wawn (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1994), p.211.

[33] The Philologist Richard Cleasby (1797-1847) started to compile an Icelandic dictionary but it remained unfinished at the time of his death. It was completed by Gudbrand Vigfusson and published by Clarendon Press in 1874.

[34] The *Dictionarium Saxonico-Latino-Anglicum,* compiled by the antiquarian scholar, William Somner (1598-1669), was first published in 1659.

[35] Andrew Wawn, 'Eiríkur Magnússon, Old Northern Philology, and Victorian Cambridge'. H.M. Chadwick Memorial Lectures 11 (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2000), p.10.

[36] It was Walter Skeat, the first holder of the Elrington and Bosworth Chair of Anglo-Saxon, who established the first Honours examination (tripos) in English Language and Literature at Cambridge in 1878. English could, however, only be taken along with either French or German and it was not until 1891 that the Medieval and Modern Languages Tripos included as one of six options, 'English language and literature from the Anglo-

pioneering spirit of Victorian entrepreneurs with that of the ancient Viking settlers. This was often expressed through nationalistic rhetoric, as in the following statement by George Webbe Dasent:

> They [the Vikings] were like England in the nineteenth century; fifty years before all the rest of the world with her manufactories and firms – and twenty years before them in railways. They were foremost in the race of civilisation and progress; well started before all the rest had thought of running. No wonder therefore that both won.[37]

It was, however, the stories themselves, in which honour and personal integrity were celebrated, that made them popular with a Victorian audience. Like those of the chivalric romances, the heroes of the sagas were seen as exemplars of Victorian Christian manliness. Virtues such as courage, reticence, honesty, physical strength and, as Clunies Ross puts it, 'calculated but not excessive aggression'[38] were contrasted with their opposites: cowardice, verbosity, treachery and physical weakness. One saga that illustrates this, and also one of the first that Morris translated, was the *Saga of Frithiof the Bold.*[39] Frithiof is a noble young man who loves a royal princess, Ingibjorg. Her cruel brothers refuse to allow them to marry, however, and instead give her as a peace-weaver to the neighbouring King Hringr when he threatens to invade. The brothers attempt to have Frithiof killed but he escapes and, after a long period of exile, eventually ends up in the service of King

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Saxon to the Middle English period; Anglo-French or Icelandic; Gothic'. Jo McMurty, *English Language, English Literature: The Creation of an Academic Discipline* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1985), p. 157.
In 1884, Oxford appointed its first Lecturer in Ancient Icelandic Literature and Antiquities, Guobrander Vigfússon, but it was not until 1953 that Gabriel Turville-Petre (1908-1978) was appointed as Professor in the subject.

[37] George Webbe Dasent, *Jest and Ernest: a Collection of Essays and Reviews.* Vol. I, p. 247.
Quoted in *Northern Antiquities,* p. 218.

[38] Clunies Ross, p.7.

[39] This saga was first translated into English by George Stephens in 1839 and there were several other translations throughout the nineteenth century; Emily S. Cappel's illustrated version in 1882, for example. According to Andrew Wawn, however, it was because of translations of Bishop Esaias Tegnér's 1825 Swedish paraphrase of the saga, rather than direct translations of the Icelandic original, that the story of Frithiof became widely accessible. The first of these translations was by the Reverend William Strong, chaplain in ordinary to William IV, in 1834 and was dedicated to Princess Alexandrina Victoria before she was crowned queen. The book was subtitled 'A Skandinavian Legend of Royal Love'.

Hringr whom he serves loyally. When the king dies, Frithiof marries Ingibjorg and they return to their homeland, Sognefjord. There, after killing one brother-in-law and receiving a pledge of loyalty from the other, Frithiof accepts the title of king. This saga exists in several versions but, in essence, the nobility of Frithiof is always contrasted with the treacherous nature of the two brothers. When he is given the task of collecting a tribute from the Orkneys, for example, Frithiof agrees to go even though the money is to be used for Ingibjorg's dowry. He declares that:

> "This thing only somewhat urges us to peace, the good will of our kin departed; but no trustiness will those brethren show herein. But this condition I make, that our lands be in good peace while we are away." So this was promised and all bound by oaths.[40]

The two brothers break their pledge, however, as this passage shows:

> But when Frithiof was gone from home, King Halfdan said to Helgi his brother: "Better lordship and more had we if Frithiof had payment for his masterful deed: now therefore let us burn his stead, and bring on him and his men such a storm on the sea as shall make an end of them." Helgi said it was a thing meet to be done.[41]

Frithiof is brave throughout his period of exile and behaves chivalrously at all times: although he had many opportunities to kill Hringr and, thus, free Ingibjorg, he serves the king loyally until the monarch dies. On his return to his own land, Frithiof does not seek vengeance but, rather, justice by killing the more treacherous elder brother and sparing the younger.

It is not surprising that Morris would have been attracted to such a tale in which the highest ideal is *drengskapr,* an Icelandic term which encompasses many virtues: truthfulness, good faith, sincerity, frankness, humanity, magnanimity, and above all, the courage to defend honour and family, flinching at neither wounds nor

[40] *C.W.* Vol. X. 'Frithiof the Bold', p.55.
[41] Ibid., p.56.

death.[42] Furthermore, Morris found in the sagas the same portrayal of male camaraderie, or, as he put it, 'manly and far-sighted friendliness',[43] seen in the mediaeval romances. It was, however, the saga hero's stoicism in the face of adversity which especially appealed to Morris. In the preface to his translation of the *Grettis Saga: The Story of Grettir the Strong,* for example, Morris states that:

> To us moderns the real interest in these records of a past state of life lies principally in seeing events true in the main treated vividly and dramatically by people who completely understood the manners, life, and above all, the turn of mind of the actors in them. […] the sagaman never relaxes his grasp of Grettir's character, and he is the same man from beginning to end; thrust this way and that by circumstances, but little altered by them; *unlucky in all things*, *yet made strong to bear all ill-luck*; scornful of the world; yet capable of enjoyment and determined to make the most of it; *not deceived by men's specious ways, but disdaining to cry out because he must needs bear with them*; scorning men, yet helping them when called on, and desirous of fame[44] (emphasis mine)

To Morris's mind, however, many women in the sagas did not love as nobly as men did and he perceived that males were often, as Ruth Kinna has stated, 'the heroic victims of love, magnetically attracted to their lovers and prone to idolise them.'[45] Morris himself said that in the sagas 'women claimed and obtained immunity for responsibility for their violence on the score of their being "weak women"'.[46] These female characters could often be cold, calculating and vengeful and were, according to Kinna, 'capable of ensnaring their lovers and of switching their affections to reject them'.[47] Perhaps this type of behaviour was painfully close to that which Morris had himself experienced and it was comforting to him to consider that his rejection by Jane likened him to the noble heroes of the past. Did he see

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[42] Jónas Kristjánsson, 'The Literary Heritage: Eddas and Sagas' *Icelandic Sagas, Eddas, and Art* (Reykjavík: The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1982), p. 16.
[43] LeMire, p.186.
[44] *C.W.* Vol. VII, p.xliij.
[45] Ruth Kinna, *Socialist Fellowship and the Woman Question* in *Writing on the Image: Reading William Morris* ed. David Latham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p.187.
[46] LeMire , p.185.
[47] Kinna, p.188.

himself as a 'quasi-saga hero',[48] as MacCarthy has suggested? This is a credible hypothesis as Morris's engagement with the Icelandic sagas had a deep and lasting effect on him. Following his first trip to Iceland in 1871, for example, Morris wrote to Eiríkur Magnússon saying that '[the trip] has done me a great deal of good both mentally & bodily and increased my debt of gratitude to Iceland.'[49] It is, furthermore, highly likely that Morris would have related to Sigurd's marital troubles as Sigurd, like Morris, has been deceived. There is a poignancy in Morris's description of the moment that Sigurd discovers that he cannot be with the woman he loves:

> Lo, Sigurd fair on the high-seat by the white-armed Gudrun's side,
> In the midst of the Cloudy People, in the dwelling of their pride!
> His face is exceeding glorious and awful to behold;
> For of all his sorrow he knoweth and his hope smit dead and cold:
> The will of the Norns is accomplished, and, lo, they wend on their ways,
> And leave the mighty Sigurd to deal with the latter days:
> The Gods look down from heaven, and the lonely King they see,
> And sorrow over his sorrow, and rejoice in his majesty.[50]
>
> (ll. 27-34)

In the above passage, Morris emphasises the depth of despair that Sigurd feels when he realises that Brynhild is now married to Gunnar. Sigurd's hope is 'dead and cold'. What is more striking, however, is Sigurd's acceptance of the 'will of the Norns' or fate. Sigurd is stoic in the face of this dreadful emotional blow from which he will never recover: 'And he seeth the ways of the burden till the last of the uttermost end.'[51] Despite his own personal unhappiness, however, Sigurd remains 'majestic' and does not burden anyone else with his grief:

> So he spake as a King of the people in whom all fear is dead,
> And his anguish no man noted,[52]
>
> (ll.2-3)

[48] MacCarthy, p.291.
[49] *Letters,* Vol. I, p.147.
[50] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p.200.
[51] Ibid., p. 201. L.8.
[52] Ibid., p.202.

It is worth noting, however, that the idea of women as inconstant and manipulative is the antithesis to the portrait of Ingibjorg in the version of the *Frithiof* saga which became so popular during Queen Victoria's reign. The heroine, Ingibjorg, is the Victorian ideal of womanhood; demure, dutiful and chaste. She represents, according to Reverend Strong, 'the glorious conquest of the sense of female dignity and patriotic duty, over fervent and deep- rooted affection.'[53]

In 1868, Morris's profound intellectual curiosity led him to make a further study of the Icelandic sagas, the vast number of which had not been translated into English. It was at this time that Morris asked Magnússon for tuition in mediaeval Icelandic and for assistance in translating the sagas: suffice to say that this collaboration ultimately appears to have been successful. Magnússon was as eager to teach as Morris was to learn, and both men were keen to make the Icelandic sagas available to English readers. Magnússon, like Morris, believed that the past and the present were inextricably linked: as a consequence, studying the past was a political, moral and emotional imperative to him. Furthermore, Magnússon's (and Morris's) favourite period of Iceland's history was from the Settlement up to the mid-eleventh century. This was the Commonwealth period (870-1262 a.d.) prior to Iceland's subjugation by Norway, and it was a time noted for its independence and egalitarianism. Icelanders repudiated both the institution of kingship and the notion of social hierarchy although its social institutions were modelled on those of Norway and many early settlors claimed close family relationships with Norwegian royalty. There was, for example, no allodial system of land ownership nor was there a law of primogeniture to limit the inheritance of land. It is also noteworthy that the social position of women was markedly better in Iceland than in Norway. Women in the

[53] *Northern Antiquities,* p. 235.

sagas are powerful and frequently dominate their husbands. As we have seen,[54] they often have several suitors and arrange their own marriages (and divorces).[55] These portrayals are supported by the occurrence of the many metronymic names of early Icelanders as well as the substantial number of farms bearing women's names.[56] In addition, a significant number (one in six) of the Icelandic skalds who entertained in the court of Norway bore metronymic names, and according to Zoë Borovsky, at least one of them was a woman, Steinvör Sighvatsdóttir.[57] This suggests a correlation between matriarchal households and the art of skaldship. Undoubtedly, the sagas that derived from the Commonwealth period were the creations of free men *and* women[58] and Morris was perfectly aware of this. During his first visit to Iceland, for example, Morris describes in his journal his first sight of Midfjördur Valley, (the birthplace of Grettir the Strong) and a ruined hut called Torfastead. He writes that 'Torfa was a poetess much told of in tales of this countryside as Skald Torfa'.[59]

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[54] *The Laxdaela Saga.* See Chapter Three of this thesis.

[55] Gudrun in the *Laxdaela Saga* marries several times. She persuades her husband, Boli, to kill Kjartin, his foster-brother.

[56] Barthi Guthmundsson, *The Origin of Icelanders* trans. Lee M. Hollander (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), p.40. Farms in Iceland were named by adding the suffix 'stathir' (stead) to the owner's name. According to Guthmundsson, eleven per cent of early farmsteads in Iceland bore a woman's name, as in, *Disastathir,* literally, Disa's farm. This was proportionately almost seventeen times higher than in Norway.

[57] Zoe Borovsky, 'Never in Public: Women and Performance in Old Norse Literature'. *The Journal of American Folklore,* Vol. 112, No. 443 (Winter 1999), pp. 6-39. According to Borovsky, there are two female skalds listed in Snorri Sturlsson's *Skáldatal* (list of court poets); Vilborg, a *hirðskáld* (a poet attached to the king's retinue), with Oláfr kyrri (1066-93); and the Icelandic Steinvör Sighvatsdöttir (d. 1271).

[58] Women were often celebrated for their knowledge of the past. Ari Porgilsson, author of the *Íslendingabók,* praises one of his female sources, Þuríðr Snorradóttir (1024-1112), for being 'wise and truthful'. Quoted in Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 104. Jochens contends that, although public performance was limited to men and prophetesses, all women undoubtedly told stories privately to their children.

[59] *Icelandic Journals,* p.77.

(III) The Translations

Morris's and Magnússon's method of working on translations of the sagas was, admittedly, unusual. At first, they would read a saga together in order for Morris to get a general sense of the story. Magnússon would then prepare a literal translation and give it to Morris who would, in turn, produce his own version which often contained rather archaic language. This can be seen in the following passage from *The Story of Grettir the Strong* (1869): "Thorgeir was outlawed, but for Thormod was taken were-gild, and he to be quit. By this blood-suit Thorstein and Asmund were deemed to have waxed much. And now men ride home from the Thing."[60] Phrases such as 'he to be quit' and 'deemed to have waxed much' would have surely seemed as awkward to the Victorian reader as they do today. Arguably, however, Morris's literal translations of the kennings 'were-gild' and 'blood-suit' give the passage a linguistic authenticity which is not present in, say, G.H. Hight's more intelligible rendition of the same lines from 1914: "Thorgeir was banished but Thormod was discharged upon payment of blood-money. Asmund and Thorstein gained great glory by this case. The men rode home from the Thing."[61] Magnússon acknowledged Morris's use of antiquated language and syntax reminiscent of Anglo-Saxon poetry, but attributed it to Morris's moving away from the romance of southern Europe towards the literature of the North. After Morris's death, Magnússon wrote that:

> Morris was, as everybody knows, a devoted lover of Chaucer, and otherwise widely read in Middle English literature. This reading early gave his poetical diction a certain old-time flavour. But this was the marked difference that, while Middle English literature is markedly coloured by the use of Romance words, Morris's poetry and his narrative prose are as markedly Teutonic. He often used to say that the Teutonic was the

[60] William Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon, *The Story of Grettir the Strong* (London: George Prior Publishers, 1980), p.82.

[61] www.northvegr.ord/sagas Accessed 16/06/14.

> poetical element in English, while the Romance element was that of law, practice and business. […] This dignity in style [of the sagas] cannot be reached by the Romance element in English. If it is to be reached at all – and then only approximately – it must be by means of the Teutonic element of our speech, the nearest akin to Icelandic[62]

According to Magnússon, Morris was especially attracted to the idea that the Icelandic sagas were accessible to entire communities and not just an educated élite. As Magnússon stated: 'It was clear [to Morris] that the saga-man's art of setting forth in tale the deeds of the men of old was patronized by aristocratic audiences no less than by plebeian'.

Moreover, any translation of a literary text reflects the period in which it is produced and, as John Kennedy has argued, Morris's method was influenced by the Victorian approach to the translation of ancient literature. Kennedy states, for example, that:

> An archaic style was felt to add dignity to a translation, to demonstrate proper respect for the text being translated. More importantly, it was felt to emphasise the remoteness in time of the text's composition, and to replicate, in some degree the experience which a fluent reader of the source language in modern times would experience in confronting the original. [63]

Kennedy's theory is supported by an examination of other translations of the sagas made during the early Victorian period. Dasent's 1861 rendering of the *Njal's Saga* (*The Story of Burnt Njal*), for example, contains the following lines:

> It happened once that those brothers, Hauskuld and Hrut, rode to the Althing, and there was much people at it. Then Hauskuld said to Hrut, "One thing I wish, brother, and that is, that thou wouldst better thy lot and woo thyself a wife."[64]

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[62] *C.W.* Vol. VII, p.xvij.
[63] John Kennedy, 'English Translations of *Völsunga saga'*. *Northern Antiquities,* p. 287.
[64] George Webbe Dasent, *Njal's Saga: The Story of Burnt Njal* (Norderstedt: Digireads.com Publishing, 2012), p.7.

> [Það var einu hverju sinni að þeir bræður riðu til alþingis, Höskuldur og Hrútur. Þar var fjölmenni mikið.Þá ræddi Höskuldur við Hrút: "Það vildi eg bróðir að þú bættir ráð þitt og bæðir þér konu."][65]

The syntax of Dasent's phrase 'there was much people at it' is, to our ears, awkward. Furthermore, words like 'thou', 'thy', 'thyself' and 'wouldst' are as outmoded as anything in Morris's saga translations. The opening lines of the *Völsunga Saga* are translated by Morris as follows, for example:

> Here begins the tale and tells of a man whose name was Sigi and called of men the son of Odin; another man withal is told of in the tale hight Skadi, a great man and mighty of his hands; yet was Sigi the mightier and the higher of kin, according to the speech of men of that time.[66]

> [Hér hefr upp ok segir frá þeim manni, er Sigi er nefndr ok kallaðr. At héti sonr óðins. Annarr maðr er nefndr til sögunnar, er Skaði hét. Hann var ríkr ok mikillfyrir sér, en þó var Sigi þeira enn ríkari ok aettstaerri, at því er men maeltu í þann tíma.][67]

Compare this with Byock's relatively recent translation of the same lines:

> Here we begin by telling of a man who was named Sigi, and it was said that he was the son of Odin. Another man, called Skadi, is introduced into the saga; he was powerful and imposing. Sigi, however, was the more important of the two and was of better stock, according to what was said in those days.[68]

Byock's diction is also a little archaic by late twentieth- century standards. Phrases such as 'of better stock' are hardly in everyday usage and the opening sentence could be rendered in a more contemporary idiom as, say, 'This is the story of a man called Sigi who, according to legend, was Odin's son.' It appears that Byock, too, is attempting to evoke the feeling of a past era and, therefore, like Morris, is trying to emulate the old Icelandic poets who, according to Robert Gutman, 'sought

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[65] www.njala.is/en/burnt-njal. Accessed 12/6/14.
[66] *C.W.* Vol. VII, p. 291.
[67] www.northvegr.org/oldicelandicsagas. Accessed 3/6/14.
[68] Byock, *The Saga of the Volsungs*, p. 35.

atmosphere by the very same means [that is] the use of already obsolete words.'[69] Morris's employment of the word 'hight',[70] instead of 'named' or 'called', is one such example. He may, however, have used this Old English word in order to emphasize the link between Old English and Icelandic. On this subject, Kennedy has stated that:

> Old English was far more similar to Old Norse than Modern English is, and by imitating older forms of English and using where possible Germanic words rather than their Romance equivalents the translator could stress the ancient link between the English-speaking peoples and the Scandinavians.[71]

Carolyne Larrington has also suggested that another problem in translating Old Norse into English is the lack of synonyms which, she argues, inevitably 'invites the use of Latinate words or archaisms to fill the gap.'[72] Whatever reasons he had for employing an archaic style, it appears that Morris's translation was equally problematic for some of his contemporaries as this extract from an unsigned review of *The Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs* in the *Spectator* in August 1870 demonstrates:

> There are certain archaisms which become intolerable when made a practice of. 'Maid' or 'maiden' is as good and honest and English word as 'may' and we warn Mr. Morris that of his 'mays' we are heartily tired. 'Adrad' may pass muster in verse; but when we find it wilfully inserted in prose, we long for the simpler 'afeared' or even 'afraid'.[73]

Morris's renderings of the sagas, however, were based on a profound knowledge of, and empathy with, mediaeval Iceland.[74] This was essential, as a "successful"

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[69] William Morris, *Völsunga saga: The Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs.* Intro. By Robert W Gutman (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 79.

[70] 'Hight' is derived from the Old English word 'heht', the preterite of 'hatan' meaning 'to name or to call'.

[71] *Northern Antiquities,* p. 288.

[72] Carolyne Larrington, 'Translating the *Poetic Edda* into English'. *Old Norse Made New: Essays on the Post-Medieval Reception of Old Norse Literature and Culture,* eds. D. Clark and C. Phelpstead. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2007), p. 31. Larrington's essay (pp. 21-42) is a detailed discussion of the problems of translating Old Norse and Icelandic into English.

[73] *The Critical Heritage,* pp.160-161.

[74] Morris demonstrates his knowledge of the history and culture of Mediaeval Iceland in his lecture entitled 'The Early Literature of the North-Iceland' first delivered in 1887, though Eugene LeMire argues that this may have been a revised version of an earlier lecture from 1884.

translation of a text from one language to another requires an understanding of both cultures as well as both languages. As Umberto Eco has observed, 'Translation is always a shift, not between two languages but between two cultures – or two encyclopaedias'.[75] Moreover, translation is frequently a cumulative undertaking as translators often engage with previous renderings of the source text. In the case of the *Völsunga Saga,* however, there was no English translation available to Morris and Magnússon so their 1870 version can be unequivocally viewed as a ground-breaking effort which influenced many later scholars, such as J.R.R. Tolkein.[76]

It was in 1869 that Magnússon first introduced Morris to the *Völsunga Saga,* the text that Morris believed was the 'most complete and dramatic form of the great Epic of the North'.[77] Their prose translation, entitled *The Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs,* was published in 1870 and Morris was to record in the Preface his surprise that such a tale had not been translated into English before, especially given its significance to his age:

> For the Great Story of the North, which should be to all our race what the Tale of Troy was to the Greeks – to all our race first, and afterwards, when the change of the world has made our race nothing more than a name of what has been – a story too – then it should it be to those who come after us no less than the Tale of Troy has been to us.[78]

Morris, like Magnússon, wanted to make the Icelandic sagas available in English to a wide readership, not just to an élite group of scholars. As they declare in the

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[75] Umberto Eco, *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation* (London: Weidenfield & Nicolson, 2003), p. 82.

[76] Tolkien (1892-1973) was Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford from 1925-1945 and gave lectures and tutorials on Old Norse Language and Literature every year from 1926 to 1939 . Tolkien's version of the *Völsunga Saga*, *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún,* though done in the 1930s, was published posthumously in 2009. In the introduction written by his son, Christopher, Tolkien expresses regret that Morris's prediction that the *Völsunga Saga* would become as important to the British as the Trojan myth was to the Greeks had not ultimately come to pass. 'How far off and remote now the words of William Morris! The Tale of Troy has been falling into oblivion since that time with surprising rapidity. But the Völsungs have not taken its place.' J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Legend of Sigurd & Gudrún,* ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: Harper Collins, 2009), p.13.

[77] *C.W.* Vol. VII, p.283.

[78] Ibid., p.286.

introduction to their translation, 'it is to the lover of poetry and nature, rather than the student, that we appeal to enjoy and wonder at this great work.'[79]

At this point it is worth considering why Morris was attracted to the *Völsunga Saga* at all, particularly given the wealth of Icelandic sagas which had not previously been translated into English. In his 1886 list of Best One Hundred Books, Morris includes the *Heimskringla* (*The tales of the Norse Kings)* and 'Some half-dozen of the best Icelandic sagas'.[80] He describes them as 'admirable pieces of tale-telling'[81]which were the product of a community rather than one single author. Morris calls them 'Bibles' and states that 'they cannot always be measured by a literary standard, but, to me are far more important than any literature. They are in no sense the work of individuals, but have grown up from the very hearts of the *people.*'[82]

Morris does not specify the 'half-dozen or so' sagas, but it is obvious that he considered the *Völsunga saga* the best of them all.[83] In his lecture 'The Early Literature of the North-Iceland', Morris said that the Niblung Tale was, '[…]the noblest and in a sense the completest story yet made by man, embracing the highest range of tragedy; passion, love, duty, valour, honour, in strife the blind force of fate, vanquished by it but living again in death in the souls of all the generations […]'[84]

Another reason for Morris's admiration for the *Völsunga Saga* was, undoubtedly, the fact that it is one of the *fornaldarsögur* (sagas of ancient time*).* This type of saga deals with people and events from the period prior to the Settlement of

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[79] *C.W.* Vol. VII, p. 283.
[80] *Letters*, Vol. II, p. 516.
[81] Ibid., p. 516.
[82] Ibid., p. 515.
[83] *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung* was one of the last books published by the Kelmscott Press in 1898. Fragments of the poem, however, had already been set in type and copies given to a few of Morris's friends before his death in October 1896. See Stuart Blersch, 'The Craft of Revision: Morris and *Sigurd the Volsung'*. *The After-Summer Seed: Reconsiderations of William Morris's The Story of Sigurd The Volsung,* ed. John Hollow (New York: The William Morris Society, 1978), p.17.
[84] LeMire, p. 192.

Iceland and, as Morris had a scholarly interest in history, and it is not difficult to see, therefore, why he would have been drawn to this kind of saga. Other forms of the saga include *Riddarasögurr* (sagas of Knights*), Konungasögur* (Kings' sagas) and *İslendingasögur* (sagas of Icelanders or Family Sagas*).* The latter deals with the lives and fortunes of the Icelandic people from the Settlement up to the eleventh century. It is significant that nearly all of the sagas that Morris translated are either *fornaldasögur* or *İslendingasögur.* He was clearly fascinated by Iceland's early history as well its rich tradition of oral literature. By the tenth century, within a hundred years of the first Settlement, Icelanders were already celebrated as storytellers throughout the northern lands and Icelandic skalds were earning their living in the royal courts of Scandinavia and Anglo-Saxon England. There are many theories as to why Iceland, more than any other Viking settlement, produced such a rich body of vernacular literature. These range from the rather prosaic (and probably true) suggestion by Saxo Grammaticus, the thirteenth-century Danish historian, that the long dark nights of winter and the barren landscape may have stimulated literary productivity[85] to the more recent theory that all colonial societies are interested in their origins and frequently measure themselves against their parent societies.[86]

The answer may also lie, however, in an examination of why the first settlers went to Iceland. Those who arrived as free men and women, predominantly from Norway, were motivated by either economic or political reasons. Some came in search of a more prosperous life and others to escape the tyranny of the Norwegian

[85] Clunies Ross, p. 11.
Morris, too, comments on the long dark nights during which the tradition of members of a household mending and spinning whilst 'someone reads to them the deeds of their forefathers' was still practised at the time of his visits in 1871 and 1873. (LeMire, p.194.)
[86] Clunies Ross, p. 31.

King Haraldr Harfagri (*c*.870-932).[87] Also among the first settlors were Celts, many of whom were slaves, particularly female,[88] from the Northern British Isles. The one common factor uniting these peoples was that they were all exiles and, as a consequence, would, most probably, have been keen to recall their ancestry and social origins. It is noteworthy that a great deal of Icelandic vernacular writing is concerned with the twin topics of genealogy and history.[89] On this subject, Heather O'Donoghue has observed that, 'archaeological and social historians have long recognised that emigrant communities preserve the traditions of their homeland in more conservative, even exaggerated, forms than the source community.'[90] Finding themselves on an island a long way from mainland Europe, the first Icelandic settlors preserved and retold old folklore as a precious bond with their distant homelands.

It should also be noted that the early Icelanders bear a striking similarity to the Wanderers in Morris's *The Earthly Paradise.* Both groups are exiles and find comfort in their new countries by relating tales from their past cultures. The subject of exile was, arguably, something else that attracted Morris to the Icelandic sagas, and the *Völsunga Saga,* in particular. Alienated from contemporary industrial society and estranged from his wife, Morris, an emotional exile, sought his own earthly paradise in the pre-industrial landscape of Iceland. Like the Icelandic settlors and his fictional Wanderers, Morris derived solace from Old Icelandic folklore and the Old English literature of his ancestors.

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[87] According to the *Landnámabók ,* the history of the Settlement of Iceland composed by Ari the Wise (1067-1148) (although extant manuscripts date from a later period), the main immigrants were those from western Norway who had refused to accept Harald's sovereignty after he declared himself King of all Norway in 866 A.D. See Holger Arbman, *The Vikings* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1961), pp. 106-107.

[88] Recent studies of mitochondrial DNA of a sample of pre-1000 Icelandic skeletons point to a difference between males and females in place of origin. A much greater proportion of female settlers (65%) seem to have come from Scotland and Ireland and a much higher percentage of men (75-80%) from Norway and other parts of mainland Scandinavia. See Clunies Ross, p. 6.

[89] Clunies Ross, p.11.

[90] Heather O'Donoghue, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwells Publishing, 2004), p.145.

(IV) *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs*

(i) Introduction

Morris began work on his epic poem in October 1875 and completed it the following year. This was almost three years after his second visit to Iceland and this time lag raises an interesting question. If Morris found his trips to Iceland so inspiring, why did it take him so long to begin writing *Sigurd?* One might also ask why he chose to write *Sigurd* at all given his previous declaration of never attempting a poetic version of the *Völsunga Saga*. In 1869, whilst working on the *Völsunga* translation Morris wrote to his friend, Charles Eliot Norton, for example, that :

> I had it in my head to write an epic of it [*Völsunga Saga*], but though I still hanker after it, I see clearly that it would be foolish, for no verse could render the best parts of it, and it would only be a flatter and tamer version of a thing already existing.[91]

There are many factors that contributed to the delay in the writing of *Sigurd.* Morris was depressed and homesick after his second visit to Iceland, and on his return he wrote to a friend, 'I suppose I shall never see […] Iceland again and, the days of these two journeys there have grown inexpressibly solemn to me.'[92] Rossetti was also still ensconced at Kelmscott with Jane, which made it difficult, emotionally, for Morris to visit the house that he loved.[93] Furthermore, the bitter legal wrangling that followed Morris's decision to wrest control of the Firm from his 'sleeping' partners occupied much of his time and he was equally busy in other fields. In addition to his

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[91] *Letters*, Vol. I, p. 99.
[92] Ibid., p. 200.
[93] In November 1872 Morris wrote a letter to his friend and *confidante,* Aglaia Coronio. In it he admits to feeling low and says, 'another quite selfish business is that Rossetti has set himself down at Kelmscott as if he never meant to go away; and not only does that keep me away from that harbour of refuge, (because it really is a farce our meeting when we can help it) but also he has all sorts of ways so unsympathetic with the sweet simple place'. *Letters,* Vol. 1, p. 172.

work illuminating manuscripts, he developed a keen interest in textile dyeing, and as a result spent much of his time at a silk dyeing factory in Leek. He continued to work on other translations: *Three Northern Love Stories* was published in 1875, the same year that he finally took his Master of Arts at Oxford and, in the following year, Morris's translation of the *Aeneid* came out.

It is interesting to note that some critics have pointed to the premiere of Richard Wagner's operatic redaction of the *Völsunga Saga* as a possible influence on Morris's decision to write *Sigurd.* In her thesis[94] comparing Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and Morris's *Sigurd,* for example, Jane Ennis posits the theory that Morris wrote *Sigurd* as a direct response to Wagner's opera. This is unlikely, however, as he had read Alfred Forman's translation [95] of Wagner's libretto as early as November 1873. If Morris's sole motive for writing *Sigurd* had been to respond to the *Ring Cycle,* it is far more likely that he would have begun it shortly after reading Wagner's version.

It could be that a more plausible reason for Morris's change of heart and his decision, finally, to create an epic version of the *Völsunga Saga* can be found in an analysis of the poem itself. *Sigurd* is divided into four books. The first concerns Sigurd's father, Sigmund, son of King Völsung, and the disastrous marriage of Sigmund's sister, Signy, to Siggeir, King of the Goths. The second and third books

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[94] Jane Susanna Ennis, *A Comparison of Richard Wagner's 'Der Ring des Nibelugen' and William Morris's 'Sigurd the Volsung'* (Ph.D Thesis, University of Leeds, July 1993).

[95] In November 1873 Morris wrote to Henry Buxton Brown, thanked him for sending him a copy of his brother's translation of Wagner's libretto and went on to say '[…] nor to say the truth I am not much interested in anything Wagner does, as his theories on musical matters seem to me as an artist and non-musical man perfectly abominable: besides I look upon it as nothing short of desecration to bring such a tremendous and world-wide subject under the gaslights of an opera: the most rococo and degraded of all forms of art.' *Letters*, Vol. I, p. 205.
For a comparison between Wagner's and Morris's versions of the *Völsunga Saga,* see David Ashurst's essay, 'Wagner, Morris, and the Sigurd Figure: Confronting Freedom and Uncertainty'. *Revisiting the Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Heroic Legend* eds. P. Acker and C. Larrington (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 219-237.

centre on Sigurd, relating the events of his life, the slaying of Fafnir the serpent, his betrothal to Brynhild, his ill-fated marriage to Gudrun the Niblung and, ultimately, his death. The last book tells the story of Gudrun's passing and the fall of the Niblungs. *Sigurd* is a poem of over eleven thousand lines, more than four times as long as Morris's prose translation. The first few lines are typical of the style throughout the poem:

> There was a dwelling of Kings ere the *world was waxen* old;
> *Dukes* were the *door-wards* there, and the roofs were thatched
> with gold;
> Earls were the *wrights* that *wrought* it, and silver nailed its doors;
> Earls' *wives* were the *weaving-women*, queens' daughters strewed
> its floors
> And the *masters* of the song-craft were the *mightiest men* that cast
> The *sails* of the *storm* of *battle* adown the *blickering blast*.[96]
>
> (ll.1-6, emphasis mine)

The poem consists of rhyming couplets and the frequent alliteration and the presence of kennings, such as *door-wards*, are features of Old English alliterative poetry.[97] The caesura in almost every line creates a natural pause, reminiscent of the Old English split verse form. Morris's diction, as with his translations, is often archaic: he uses words such as *ere, wrought* and *adown.* Few critics then and now would agree with Theodore Watts' assertion that *Sigurd* was Morris's 'greatest achievement.'[98] In her biography of Morris, for example, MacCarthy opines that his canon is scarcely read these days but points to *Sigurd* as an exception to her lamentation. 'I would not press the claims of Morris's own favourite *Sigurd the Völsung*; it is too large, too chant-like.'[99] Morris, however, wanted to inspire the reading public with the heroic tales of heroes like Sigurd but he also desired to

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[96] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p.1.

[97] This similarity further supports the argument made in Chapter Three of this thesis that Morris was, by the mid 1860s, familiar with Old English poetry in translation.

[98] Theodore Watts, *Athenaeum* unsigned review (December 1876, no. 2563), p. 753-755. Quoted in *The Critical Heritage*, pp.230-232.

[99] MacCarthy, p ix.

recreate (and emulate) the craft of the mediaeval Icelandic *skald* and Old English *scop.* He wrote a verse epic of the *Völsunga Saga* that, he believed, was similar to one which would have been recited by bards living in the Middle Ages.[100] Morris's use of archaic language is consistent with that objective and also serves to distance the epic tale from his time. This view is endorsed by Simon Dentith when he states that Morris 'wished to create a new example of a "primary epic" inspired by the ethos and imagination of the past age within which it should have been composed.'[101] It is not difficult to imagine an Icelandic story-teller entertaining a household over, say, four successive evenings with his or her rendition of *Sigurd.* Likewise, Morris himself took great delight in reading the poem aloud to his friends and family. George Bernard Shaw, who met Morris some years after *Sigurd* was first published, wrote that Morris 'used to recite passages from [*Sigurd*], marking its swing by rocking from one foot to the other like an elephant.'[102]

Morris's poem is, according to Dentith, 'undoubtedly a virtuoso exercise in an astonishing idiom'[103] but, arguably, Morris set himself an extremely difficult, if not impossible, task. Could anyone, even Morris, capture the techniques of the early mediaeval oral poets in a written verse epic in the nineteenth century? Are the two verse forms, separated as they are by centuries of social and cultural evolution and, of course, the spread of literacy, simply incompatible? Albert B. Lord, for one, argued that they are: "Once the oral technique is lost, it is never regained. The written technique, on the other hand, is not compatible with the oral technique, and

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[100] According to Anthony Ugolnik, Morris 'tried very consciously to be an oral poet, to rely upon metrical and stylistic devices which were the heritage of an oral poetic tradition'. 'The Victorian Skald: Old Icelandic and the Evolution of William Morris' *Sigurd the Volsung'. The After Summer Seed: Reconsiderations of William Morris's The Story of Sigurd the Volsung.* ed. John Hollow (New York: The William Morris Society, 1978), pp. 62-3.

[101] Simon Dentith, *William Morris and the Great Story of the North.* Kelmscott House, 6th September 2008. Reproduced in *The William Morris Society Newsletter,* New Year 2009, p.26.

[102] George Bernard Shaw, *Morris As I Knew Him* from May Morris Vol. 2 p.xxxvii (hereafter, 'Shaw').

[103] Simon Dentith, *Epic and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 83.

the two could not possibly combine to form another third technique. […] The two by their very nature are mutually exclusive."[104] This is, however, a rather harsh assessment. It is true that Morris's *Sigurd* could not have the same impact on a modern audience as the sagas had on mediaeval (and largely illiterate) Icelanders. His epic poem, however, is certainly reminiscent of the poetic tradition of the sagas and, arguably, Morris successfully evokes the craft of the *skald.*

These oral performances would never be exactly the same twice, of course. Each *skald* or *scop* would tell the tale in his or her own way, subtly varying it, perhaps to suit his or her audience and thus making the performances more relevant and, hence, more entertaining. Such dynamism and spontaneity is lost, however, when the 'poem' is written down. Benjamin Bagby, who is noted for his performances of the first third of *Beowulf,* puts the matter concisely: 'The central dilemma in any attempt to revocalize a medieval text as living art is based on the fact that a written source can only represent one version (and possibly not the best version) of that text from a fluid oral tradition.'[105] Whether one agrees with Bagby's assertion that recreating an oral performance of a mediaeval poem is merely very difficult, or Lord's declaration that it is impossible, it is probably fair to say that even now Morris's most fervent admirers, those who appreciate his objective of recreating the art of skald-ship , consider *Sigurd* deeply flawed. Simon Dentith put it succinctly when he said that, 'it [*Sigurd*] is both wonderful and a poetic dead-end.'[106] The majority of Morris's contemporaries did not believe, like Shaw, that *Sigurd* was 'the greatest epic since Homer'.[107] It was, rather, not remotely to their taste. Just as Morris's return to the decorative craft techniques of the Middles Ages meant that his handmade furniture

[104] Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), p.129. www.morrisedition.lib.uiowa.edu.
[105] Benjamin Bagby, *Beowulf Programme Notes.* (Edinburgh International Festival, 2007), p.15.
[106] Dentith, p. 83.
[107] Shaw, p. xxxvii.

and furnishings were only affordable by a rich élite, so too *Sigurd* was only accessible to those who had the 'wealth' of knowledge of Old English and the Old Norse language and literature of the Middle Ages.

Morris's archaisms in *Sigurd*, however, not only evoke an older and quite literally more popular [108] style: they also serve to emphasise the strangeness of the past. The poem's very foreignness accentuates the fact that the heroic, altruistic ideals exemplified in the epic were largely absent in Morris's time. As Dentith has stated, in *Sigurd* 'Morris's evocation of the epic past stands as the positive pole against which "modern civilisation" is measured and found wanting.'[109] *Sigurd* was a response to the destruction of the environment caused by Victorian industrialisation and the social inequalities perpetuated by capitalism. The pursuit of profit in a competitive market inevitably led to manufacturers constantly aiming to produce more goods ever more cheaply. This, of course, meant not only more factories polluting the environment but also harsher working conditions and lower wages for the workers who were performing monotonous tasks. Morris was later to write explicitly about his vision for a new equitable society: one where all individuals had pleasant and meaningful work in a sustainable and attractive environment. The following close reading of *Sigurd,* a text which was written *before* his politically active period, however, reveals much of Morris's nascent eco-social thought.

[108] Dentith, p.75.
[109] Dentith, p. 80.

(ii) Social equality and the sense of community

In his lecture entitled 'The Early Literature of the North-Iceland' (1887), Morris declared that mediaeval Icelandic society was based on the principle of 'equal personal rights of all freedmen'. [110] Initially, therefore, one might wonder why Morris chose to write a poem based on a saga concerning a royal dynasty? Interestingly, however, Morris adheres to a recognised epic convention by beginning in *media res.* He dispenses with much of the history of the Volsungs[111] and at the start of his work Sigurd's grandfather, King Volsung, is on the throne. Consequently, Morris's poem centres on the life of the hero, Sigurd. At the time of his birth, there was peace and happiness in the land:

> There merry men went bedward when their tide of toil was done,
> And glad was the dawn's awakening, and the noon-tide fair and glad:
> There no great store had the franklin, and enough the hireling had;
> And a child might go unguarded the length and breadth of the land
> With a purse of gold at his girdle and gold rings on his hand.[112]
>
> (ll. 20-24)

The above lines portray a society in which everyone is working for the benefit of the community as a whole. Early Icelandic society was, Morris believed, an example of this perceived ideal. In his 1887 lecture, 'The Early Literature of the North-Iceland' , he states of the period of Settlement that:

> Political society was not yet founded; personal relations between men were what was considered and not territorial: when a priest or chief moved as sometimes happened, many of his thing-men accompanied him, there was no territorial unit to which loyalty was exacted.[113]

Morris believed that a strong sense of community was important for everyone. As Pepper has stated, 'to be fully human is to live with others and be as concerned for

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[110] LeMire, p.184.
[111] The Volsungs were descended from Odin whose son, Sigi, was King Volsung's grandfather and Sigurd's great, great grandfather.
[112] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p. 61.
[113] LeMire, p. 183.

them as one is for oneself.'[114] This is the very antithesis of the cult of the individual of the Victorian age which was fostered by the competitive, self-seeking nature of capitalism.

Sigurd is a Volsung and undoubtedly has aristocratic[115] qualities, but he is equally a man of the people. He quickly proves that he is a worthy leader. As a child he is:

> […] keen and eager of wit
> And full of understanding, and oft hath he joy to sit
> Amid talk of weighty matters when wise men meet for speech;
> And joyous he is moreover and blithe and kind with each.[116]
> (ll. 13-16)

As David Ashurst has observed, Morris's Sigurd is 'one whose greatness is rooted in society, not separated from it, who becomes a thoughtful, caring, cultured prince'.[117] The epic convention of the intertwining of the fate of the people and their hero also pervades *Sigurd.* In the first book of the poem concerning the massacre of King Volsung and his men, for example, we find the following lines:

> Lo, now as the plotting was long, so short is the tale to tell
> How a *mighty people's leaders* in the field of murder fell.[118]
> (ll. 37-38, emphasis mine)

It is noteworthy that Morris uses the phrase 'mighty *people's* leaders' and not 'people's mighty leaders', indicating the importance of the entire community. The Volsungs are led by individuals who symbolize the ideals and values of the society, not by a dictator. This is in sharp contrast to the treacherous tyrant, Siggeir, King of

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[114] Pepper, p.17.
[115] The *Völsunga Saga* mentions the *kurteisi (*courtesy) that Sigurd displayed while growing up.
[116] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p. 67.
[117] David Ashurst, 'Wagner, Morris and the Sigurd Figure' in *Revisiting the Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Heroic Legend.* Eds. Paul Acker & Carolyne Larrington (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 220.
[118] *C.W.* Vol. XII, pp. 15-16.

the Goths, who sent his forces to ambush King Volsung but who himself, 'came not to the battle, nor faced the Volsung sword'[119].

It is worth re-stating here that, like all the Icelandic sagas, the *Völsunga Saga* was first written in the thirteenth century but was based on the strong oral tradition of storytelling that had existed since the Settlement. The thirteenth century was a time of uncertainty and political change in Iceland. As a consequence of Iceland's conversion to Christianity and, more significantly, its submission to the Norwegian monarchy in 1262, traditional life was in an upheaval. As Borovsky has stated:

> […] the customary bond of the Icelandic chieftains to the monarch based on gift and face-to-face exchange was replaced with the depersonalized, abstract notion of taxation, and the concrete reality of inalienable hereditary land was latinized to reflect the concept of private or individual ownership for the benefit of both church and state.[120]

The autonomy of the Icelanders was being eroded and they were, understandably, apprehensive about this change. According to Brian Stock, the fear of modernisation and change in a traditional oral culture often leads to a turning inward, a retreat into the past and archaism.[121] The Icelandic sagas exhibit, as Borovsky has observed, all the signs of just such a retreat from modernisation towards traditionalism in an attempt to restore a sense of continuity, wholeness and unity.[122] Arguably this was another reason why Morris was so attracted to the Icelandic sagas. Like many Victorians, Morris was dismayed by the exploitation of the environment and the work force caused by industrialisation and capitalism. Morris presents early Icelandic society as a model of both individual and community values which, he believed, were lacking in his time. As he had done previously, Morris returned to the heroic literature of the past in order to critique the present.

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[119] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p. 16.
[120] Borovsky, p. 14.
[121] Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp.473-476.
[122] Borovsky, p.14.

Throughout the poem, for example, Sigurd is portrayed as the perfect chivalric hero one similar to the protagonists of the mediaeval romances Morris so greatly admired. These quasi-hagiographic tales tell the story of how a hero, leaves his home, encounters many dangers, and is finally welcomed into a position of honour and authority in a new community. In the *Völsunga Saga*[123] as in Morris's poem, this 'ritual of elevation',[124] as Patrick Geary puts it, serves to trace the rites of passage of the first Icelandic settlers as well as that of Sigurd. It is Sigurd's personal characteristics and his sense of social justice, not his hereditary status, that are emphasised by Morris. On meeting the old King Griper, for example, Sigurd introduces himself saying:

> 'Hast thou spoken and known
> How there standeth a child before thee and a stripling scarcely grown?
> Or hast thou told of the Volsungs, and the gathered heart of these,
> And their still unquenched desire for garnering fame's increase?
> E'en so do I hearken thy words: for wot how they deem it long
> Till a man from their seed be arisen to deal with the cumber and wrong.[125]
> (ll. 5-10)

In these lines, Sigurd acknowledges his youth and inexperience but equally declares his intention, nevertheless, to combat 'cumber and wrong'. Sigurd is brave, loyal and has 'no guile in his heart' and Morris describes him as an exemplary individual against whom the other characters are measured and often found wanting. He is 'a golden man'[126] who inspires his fellows by his physical attributes. In keeping with the convention of mediaeval romance (which Morris never completely abandons here),

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[123] Although the events of the saga took place in the pre-Christian fourth and fifth centuries, the anonymous poet wrote the saga in the thirteenth century, after Iceland's conversion to Christianity and its subjugation by Norway in 1262-64 AD.

[124] Patrick J. Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p.154.

[125] *C. W.* Vol. XII, p.100.

[126] Ibid., p. 103.

Sigurd's comely outward appearance reflects his inner beauty and goodness. This is seen in the lines describing his meeting with the folk of Lymdale:

> But so exceeding glorious doth the harnessed rider seem,
> That men's hearts are all exalted as he draweth nigh and nigher,
> And there are they abiding in fear and great desire:
> For they look on the might of his limbs, and his waving locks they see,
> And his glad eyes clear as the heavens, and the wreath of the summer tree
> That girdeth the dread of his war-helm, and they wonder at his sword,
> And the tinkling of his hauberk, and the rings of the ancient Hoard:
> And they say: Are they Gods on the earth? Did the world change yesternight?
> Are the sons of Odin coming, and the days of Baldur the bright?[127]
>
> (ll. 18-26)

Sigurd is undoubtedly a physically impressive man, but what is more significant in the above extract is that he is compared to Baldur,[128] the god of purity and light.

Like the heroes of mediaeval romance, Sigurd seeks renown or 'measureless fame'[129] but he is not aggressive like the belligerent Niblungs. Guttorm, for example, is restless and 'longs for the meeting of swords.'[130] Sigurd, however, is the people's champion and he accordingly fights injustice, only using violence when necessary:

> And I swear to seek no quarrel, nor to swerve aside for aught,
> Though the right and the left be blooming, and the straight way wend to naught:
> And I swear to abide and hearken the prayer of any thrall,
> Though the war-torch be on the threshold and the foemen's feet in the hall:[131]
>
> (ll. 8-11)

Sigurd's promise to defend any 'thrall' is also interesting, especially when it is juxtaposed with the Niblungs' and Huns' practice of keeping slaves.[132]

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[127] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p. 141.
[128] Baldur was the son of Odin and was noted for his beauty, virtue and wisdom. Baldur's death was the first in a line of events that was to bring about Ragnarök, the destruction of the Gods. Similarly, Sigurd's death is a symbol for the loss of social and moral values in the Niblungs which, ultimately, leads to their destruction.
[129] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p.156.
[130] Ibid., p.156.
[131] Ibid., p.178.

Sigurd, however, is not alone in his concern for the well-being of others as throughout the poem the importance of fellowship is emphasised. There are frequent descriptions of halls where all members of the gens or tribe, entire communities irrespective of their occupation or gender, gather together. The following extract illustrates this point:

> Yet full is the hall of Heimir with eager earls of war,
> And the long-locked happy shepherds are gathered round the door,
> And the smith has left his stithy, and the wife has left her rock,
> And the bright thrums hang unwinded by the maiden's weaving-stock:
> And there is the wife and the maiden, the elder and the boy;[133]
> (ll. 11-15)

The egalitarian communal society depicted in the above lines still existed in nineteenth-century Iceland. In 1887 Morris wrote from first-hand experience that modern Icelandic homesteads, '[are] very populous, and more than one family commonly lives in each including possibly paupers, and (it used to be) sometimes criminals. Of the people there is little to be said save praise: they are kind, hospitable, and honest, and have no class of degradation at any rate, and don't take kindly to bullying.'[134] Morris saw in Iceland the close knit social groups that had existed since Mediaeval times: he observed a society where the old and infirm were cared for by the community and not banished to institutions, as was the case in Victorian Britain. During his first trip to Iceland in 1871, for example, Morris describes his stay with a family in Borkstead:

> I note by the way that an unsavoury idiot greeted us at the porch door asking each of us his name; he followed us into the parlour, and took up each man's glass after he had drunk and squeezed it, laughing approvingly at his cunning the while: the explanation of this was that in Iceland where there are no work houses or lunatic asylums, the paupers or lunatics are distributed among the bonders to be taken care of.[135]

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[132] Ibid., p. 158.
[133] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p. 149. This is reminiscent of the description of the Anglo-Saxon mead-hall found in Old English poetry. See the depiction of Heorot in *Beowulf,* for example.
[134] LeMire, p.180-1.
[135] *Icelandic Journals,* p. 45.

Morris's Sigurd personifies this community spirit as he sets great store by the company of others, irrespective of their social standing. Furthermore, he consistently defends the weak. It is true, though, that he swears brotherhood to the Kings Gunnar and Hogni, an act which effectively makes Sigurd a member of the renowned Niblung family:

> And now are they foster-brethren, and in such wise have they sworn
> As the God-born Goths of aforetime, when the world was newly born.
> But among the folk of the Niblungs goes forth the tale of the same,
> And men deem the tidings a glory and the garland of their fame.[136]
>
> (ll. 9-12)

Earlier in the poem, however, when Sigurd is alone on his quest he longs to be part of a happy community:

> For he would not be alone,
> But longs for the dwellings of man-folk, and the kingly people's speech,
> And the days of the glee and the joyance, where men laugh each to each.[137]
>
> (ll.25-27)

The above lines, and especially the phrase 'each to each', suggest an egalitarian group of individuals who derive pleasure from one another's company. Sigurd is an exceptional individual of noble birth, but his ultimate aim is social justice. As he introduces himself to Giuki, the old King of the Niblungs, Sigurd not only lists his own heroic achievements but, in addition, shares his aspirations:

> And yet have I slain the Serpent, and gotten the Ancient Gold,
> And broken the bonds of the weary, and ridden the Wavering Fire.
> But short is mine errand to tell, and the end of my desire:
> For peace I bear unto thee, and to all the kings of the earth,
> Who bear the sword aright, and are crowned with the crown of worth;
> But unpeace to the lords of evil, and the battle and the death;
> And the edge of the sword to the traitor, and the flame to the slanderous breath:
> And I would that the loving were loved, and I would that the weary should sleep,

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[136] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p. 180.
[137] Ibid., p. 119.

> And that man should hearken to man, and he that soweth should reap.[138]
> (ll.32-40)

Morris believed that social harmony had increased as society had developed culturally, reaching its peak in the pre-industrial Middle Ages. The emergence of capitalism, a system that favoured self-interest, had virtually destroyed all sense of community and social feeling. In a lecture first delivered in 1886, Morris wrote about the Teutonic tribal system that had existed in Anglo-Saxon England (and Iceland) when 'corporate bodies of men united into artificial families for self-preservation and the satisfaction of the mutual needs of their members'.[139] In such social groups everyone worked for the good of the entire community. This prioritisation of the group interest or 'general will' as Eugene Kamenka[140] terms it, is an expression of humanity's social and communal nature. Morris emphasises the sense of fellowship and community in *Sigurd* in order to critique his own age where social interactions were reduced to the level of relations between commodities. In nineteenth-century Britain, the dynamics of capitalism meant that both workers and entrepreneurs saw their interests in direct competition to the those of their fellows.

Sigurd the Volsung is a story about the destruction of a society (The Niblungs) brought about by greed, selfishness and lack of compassion. When the Niblungs murder the altruistic Sigurd, the symbol of social justice and fellowship, their community becomes doomed. Arguably, Morris uses this story as a paradigm for the destruction of social relations by capitalism in his own era.

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[138] Ibid., p.154.
[139] LeMire, p.164.
[140] Eugene Kamenka, *Community as a Social Ideal* (London: Arnold, 1982), p.14.

(iii) The Portrayal of Women

Later in life, when Morris articulated his socialist views, he espoused, according to Pepper, 'Marxist realism'.[141] This stance was shared by many early socialists, (H.M. Hyndman, for example). Morris did, however, differ from many of his political colleagues in several ways, one of them being in his attitude to women. Belfort Bax, with whom Morris co-wrote the Manifesto for the Socialist League in 1884, was notoriously misogynist and referred to women as being liable to hysteria and having 'inferior average mental capacity'.[142] Bax's views were shared (if not articulated quite so stridently) by many[143] so that the nineteenth-century socialist movement was, arguably, as patriarchal as the *status quo*. Indeed, many feminists have argued that this is still the case. Writing in 1996, Mary Mellor, for example, stated that 'socialism, particularly in its Marxist form, has been irredeemably patriarchal for most of its existence'.[144] Morris, however, was sympathetic to the situation of women who were historically dependent, socially and economically, on men. He believed that women's oppression needed to be addressed as part of the transition to socialism and this empathy with the plight of women which he was later to express can be seen in a close reading of *Sigurd.*

As mentioned previously, women in the sagas were often cold, calculating and vengeful[145] and they were compared to heroines who were wise, beautiful and courageous. On first reading, Morris would appear in *Sigurd* to adhere to this binary

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[141] Pepper, p.177.

[142] E. Belfort Bax, *Justice* 1th October 1895. Bax's pugnacious anti- feminist views led him into a number of verbal battles with prominent female socialists; Eleanor Marx, for example. See E. Belfort Bax, *Reminiscences and Reflections of a Mid and Late Victorian* (1918). (New York : Augustus M. Kelley, 1970).

[143] H.M. Hyndman, for example, was opposed to female emancipation and argued that women who advocated it 'ought to be sent to an island by themselves'. Quoted in Chushichi Tsuzuki, *H.M. Hyndman and British Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 190.

[144] Mary Mellor, "Ecofeminism and Ecosocialism, Dilemmas of Essentialism and Materialism" . *The Greening of Marxism,* ed. Ted Benton. (New York: Guilford Publications, 1996), p. 263.

[145] It is interesting to note that the female characters in Morris's later romances often had these characteristics, for example, the Queen in *The Well at the World's End* (1896).

view of women, one which was also a feature of his own era. A comparison of Sigmund's two wives, Borghild and Hjordis, illustrates this tendency. After the death of her brother at the hands of Sinfiotli, Borghild, Sigmund's first wife, feigns resignation while she 'brooded deadly guile'.[146] After she poisons her stepson, her punishment is not death, but divorce:

> 'Now is Queen Borghild driven from the Volsung's bed and board
> And unwedded sitteth Sigmund an exceeding mighty lord,[147]
> (ll. 13-14)

We see here an illustration of Morris's assertion that women in the sagas often obtain immunity from crimes because of their gender. Hjordis, Sigmund's second wife and mother of Sigurd, is , in complete contrast to Borghild, 'a woman wise and shapely beyond the praise of fame'[148] who proves her courage and devotion despite being pregnant by tending her dying husband on the battlefield:

> And half dead was her heart for sorrow as she waded the swathes of the sword,
> Not far did she search the death-field ere she found her king and lord
> On the heap that his glaive had fashioned: not yet his spirit past,
> Though his hurts were many and grievous, and his life-blood ebbing fast;
> And glad were his eyes and open as her wan face over him hung,[149]
> (ll. 30-34)

Hjordis is, undoubtedly, a typical saga heroine. She was beautiful but, more importantly, wise, caring and brave. Borghild, the villainess, is the very antithesis: cold, calculating and vengeful.

It is, however, worth re-considering Borghild's actions within the context of female honour in mediaeval Iceland. As mentioned previously, the social position of Icelandic women was much better than that of their Norwegian counterparts. Officially, however, they lacked any real power. A woman could, for example, attend

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[146] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p. 48.
[147] Ibid., p. 49.
[148] Ibid., p. 49.
[149] Ibid., p. 54.

the annual Althing as a member of the general public but could not speak at it. [150] Instead, it was in the domestic sphere, or *innangarðs,* and not the public realm, that Icelandic women (and their saga counterparts) exerted their authority.[151] Women could not gain honour in the same way as men, in battle or in the political and legal spheres, for example. Instead, women were chiefly concerned with maintaining the honour of the household to which they belonged. In mediaeval Iceland, however, as Joel T. Rosenthal has stated, blood remained a more steadfast social bond than marriage.[152] An Icelandic woman did not forget her obligations to her family simply because she entered into a marriage. This fierce family loyalty is evident in the *Völsunga Saga* where, as Jochens has observed, the heroines privilege kinship over marriage.[153] In a society where there was no law enforcement agency, it was the duty of the individual to avenge any wrong done to a member of his family either by physical violence or by the acceptance of *weregild*. Failure to do so was considered dishonourable. Women were not permitted by law to kill, but it was their duty to incite their male relatives to exact revenge. Thus, women could gain honour for themselves *and* their families by successful *hvöt,*[154] or incitements. On this point,

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[150] This was true even if the woman was a chieftainess as only a man could officially perform as *goði* or chieftain. According to Borovsky, the performance roles at the Althing, lawspeakers, chieftains, judges, plaintiffs and witnesses, were filled by males. A woman inheriting a chieftaincy was obliged to transfer the chieftaincy to a man in that assembly.

[151] In addition to the Althing, Old Scandinavian law made a distinction between two opposed legal spaces; *innangarðs* (inside the fence) and *útangarðs* (outside the fence). The home was inside the fence that surrounded the farm, whereas the public space was outside the fence. Women were responsible for the domestic area within the fence and men had authority outside the fence. For a detailed discussion see Aron Gurevich, 'Space and Time in the *Weltmodell* of Old Scandinavian Peoples'. *Mediaeval Scandinavia* Vol.2 (1969), pp. 42-53.

[152] Joel T.Rosenthal, "Marriage and the Blood Feud in 'heroic' Europe". *The British Journal of Sociology* 17 no. 2 (1966), pp. 133-144.

[153] Jochens, p.12.

[154] In the sagas these *hvöt* were often accompanied by laments for the deceased. Borovsky notes that this tradition may be very old for, in the first century ,Tacitus writes in the *Germania* about the German tribes in battle:

'Memoriae proditur quasdem acies inclinatas iam et labentes a feminas restituras Constantia precum et obiectu pectorum et monstrata comminus captivitate.' [It is said that faltering or losing battle lines were

Carol Clover has stated that urging vengeance was 'the ultimate form of respect, and like the men who take it, the women who urge it are, in so doing, paying due honour to the departed'.[155]

When Borghild learns that Sinfiotli has killed her brother Gudrod, she at first takes the honourable course of action by demanding that Sigmund punish Sinfiotli:

> "I charge thee now King Sigmund, as thou art lord of my bed,
> To drive this wolf of the King-Folk from out thy guarded land
> Lest all we of thine house and kindred should fall beneath his hand."[156]
> (ll. 23-25)

Sigmund refuses but, although Sinfiotli had acted honourably,[157] he offers Borghild 'mighty weregild'.[158] Borghild is not satisfied by the offer of material compensation,[159] however, and instead takes matters into her own hands by poisoning Sinfiolti. Borghild's crime was not that she demanded retribution (even though her brother was at fault) but that she, herself, killed Sinfiotli when that retribution was denied her. Morris, perhaps, had some sympathy for Borghild's actions as he does mitigate her fate. In the *Völsunga Saga,* Borghild dies of exposure following her exile. In *Sigurd,* Morris leaves the question of Borghild's ultimate fate unanswered.

It is, however, in Morris's portrayal of the more central female characters, particularly those who, according to the saga, are guilty of heinous crimes, that his true empathy with women is seen. Signy, Sigmund's sister, for example, commits

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restored by the women, by persistent entreaties, and by opposing their breast and demonstrating their immanent captivity]. Translation Borovsky's.

[155] Carol J. Clover, " Hildigunnar's Lament" *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism,* eds. J. Lindow, L. Lonnroth and G. W. Weber. (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), p. 173.

[156] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p. 45.

[157] Sinfiotli and Gudrod were sworn brothers and were successful in defeating a mighty king and seizing his treasure. Sinfiotli trusted Gudrod to share the gold equally, but he was cheated. Sinfiotli took the only honourable course of action and challenged Gudrod to a dual.

[158] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p. 45.

[159] Jesse L. Byock states that due to their strong and unwavering determination to protect their honour and that of their kinsmen, saga women are often depicted as escalating or prolonging feuds and refusing compensation for insult or injury. *Medieval Iceland*, p. 135.

incest and infanticide. Morris includes these acts in his poem but, as he does with other women from legend,[160] he offers a degree of mitigation by his sympathetic explanation of Signy's motivation. Married to Siggeir, who treacherously murders her father and all her brothers (except Sigmund), Signy seeks justice, an entirely honourable course.[161] Siggeir had damaged her family's honour and the death of her relatives must be avenged. It is true that she seduces her brother, Sigmund, by supernatural means[162] and, in so doing, she effectively commits two unlawful acts, incest and witchcraft.[163] As Jochens has observed, although '[Signy's] actions were reported in the saga without condemnation, the phenomenon was exceptional.'[164] This lack of censure is also unusual since Signy breaks the taboos of fifth century Iceland (when the events occurred), thirteenth century Iceland (when the saga was written) and, indeed, Victorian Britain. The absence of explicit criticism in the saga as well as in Morris's poem, may be due to Signy's heroic motives. Her family had been all but destroyed and she felt impelled to commit incest with her brother in order to produce a Volsung of pure blood capable of taking revenge against her husband. Furthermore, although the use of sorcery to commit incest is abhorrent,[165] to say the least, Signy's guilt is actually diminished by this very deception:

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[160] Medea, for example. See Chapter Three of this thesis.

[161] Unlike Borghild, Signy does not commit the killing herself but incites her male relatives, Sigmund and their son Sinfiotli to revenge. Although her 'incitement' is lengthy and complicated, Signy adheres to the heroic code of honour for Icelandic women. A feud between a woman's kin and her husband and in-laws did not necessarily mean the end of the marriage. It did mean, though, that the woman would revert to her original kinship ties, in Signy's case, the Volsungs, and become the avenger of her family.
For a detailed discussion see Joel T. Rosenthal, " Marriage and the Blood Feud in 'heroic' Europe." *The British Journal of Sociology* 17, no 2. (1966), pp. 133-144.

[162] Signy changes places and takes the form of a beautiful witch.

[163] Major incest (which included sexual relations with second cousins) and sorcery were illicit activities punishable by outlawry or death in thirteenth-century Iceland when the saga was written. Although the events in the saga take place in pre-Christian times, 'incest rules prohibiting sexual relations within the immediate nuclear family is a near universal phenomenon and it was probably found among Nordic people'. Jochens, p.22.

[164] Jochens, p.23.

[165] In the saga many supernatural events occur and are often brought about by women for benign as well as evil purposes. This reflects the importance of women in pagan religions. It is noteworthy that one of the

"Alone I will bear it; alone I will take the crime;
On me alone be the shaming, and the cry of the coming time.[166]
(ll. 35-36)

Signy believes that only Sigmund's child can avenge the Volsungs.[167] Because of Signy's shape-shifting, Sigmund does not knowingly commit incest and, therefore, he remains innocent. Signy also appears to find some divine justification for this act because she and Sigmund are twins:

"Where then was the ancient song
That the Gods were but twin-born once, and deemed it nothing wrong
To mingle for the world's sake,"[168]
(ll.21-23)

Morris's Signy is culpable of infanticide too, for although she herself does not commit the crime, she initially urges Sigmund to kill her two children when they discover Sigmund and Sinfiotli in Siggeir's hall:

"The end is near!
And thou with the smile on thy face and the joyful eyes and clear!
But with these thy two betrayers first stain the edge of fight,
For why should the fruit of my body outlive my soul tonight?"[169]
(ll.25-28)

In the event it is Sinfiolti, not Sigmund, who kills the two children and this is described by Morris in a graphic manner:

So she stood aside and gazed: but Sinfiotli taketh them up
And breaketh each tender body as a drunkard breaketh a cup;[170]
(ll. 33-34)

It goes without saying that it is difficult to defend the murder of children, although infanticide was practised by many early civilisations including the Icelanders.[171]

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heathen practices permitted in Iceland after its conversion to Christianity was sacrificing to pagan gods, provided it was in private or kept secret. Borovsky, p.14.

[166] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p. 27.

[167] Signy had already tested her other sons from her marriage to Siggeir by sending them to Sigmund for training. They, like their father, however, lacked courage.

[168] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p.27.

[169] Ibid., p.36.

[170] Ibid., p.36.

Signy puts her loyalty to her family above even her own children who were, in Mediaeval Icelandic society, considered her husband's kindred while she herself was not.[172] Signy knew, however, that she was going to die and, arguably, she, therefore, believed her children would be better off dead rather than orphaned: 'For why should the fruit of my body outlive my soul tonight?' Morris explains clearly the motivation behind Signy's actions here. This does not exonerate her, but it certainly mitigates her crimes.

Morris's empathy with women is also evident in his treatment of another female character who commits infanticide. At the instigation of her Niblung brothers, Gudrun, Sigurd's widow, marries Atli. In the *Völsunga Saga,* when Atli later murders her brothers, Gudrun slits her children's throats and serves their bodies up to their father, Atli, at a funeral feast:

> Then the king asked where his sons were and Gudrun answered, " I will tell thee, and gladden thine heart by the telling; lo, now, thou didst make a great woe spring up for me in the slaying of my brethren; now hearken and hear my rede and my deed; thou hast lost thy sons, and their heads are become beakers on the board here, and thou hast drunken the blood of them blended with wine; and their hearts I took and roasted them on a spit, and thou hast eaten thereof."[173]

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[171] The killing of children was, however, usually done by exposure and shortly after birth once the child's gender and physical characteristics were determined: malformed children were commonly killed. According to Carol Clover, there is no doubt that early Icelanders practiced infanticide. This is clear from among other things, the laws that forbade it. According to the *İslendingabók,* when parliament decided around 1000A.D. that the official religion and law of Iceland would be Christian, two heathen practices were specifically exempted: eating of horseflesh and exposure of children. The majority of infants left for dead were, for social and economic reasons, female. It was, however, the father's right (*not* the mother's) to decide if a child should be abandoned. Signy cannot, therefore, be exonerated on the grounds that infanticide was a cultural practice. (Interestingly, in the saga Signy has ten brothers but there is no mention of a sister. It could be inferred that the Volsungs committed female infanticide, as the normal sex ratio in Iceland is 50:50. www.statice.is Accessed 4/9/14.
For a detailed discussion on infanticide see Clovers's essay, ' The Politics of Scarcity: Notes on the Sex Ratio in Early Scandinavia'. *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature,* eds. H. Damico & A.H. Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 100-134.

[172] Rosenthal, p. 140.

[173] *C.W.* Vol. VII, p. 390.

Likewise, in Morris's poem, Gudrun desires revenge firstly against her brothers for the murder of Sigurd[174] and secondly, against Atli for the killing of her brothers. Crucially, however, there is no child-killing: after her brothers are despatched Gudrun sets fire to the hall and then stabs Atli. Before she throws herself into the sea she utters these words:

> O Sea, I stand before thee; and I who was Sigurd's wife!
> By his brightness unforgotten I bid thee deliver my life
> From the deeds and the longing of days, and the lack I have won on earth,
> And the wrong amended by wrong, and the bitter wrong of my birth![175]
> (ll. 15-18)

Like many women in the sagas, Gudrun is caught up in the violent feuding between her husband and her own family. She is forced into marrying[176] someone she does not love after the death of her beloved Sigurd. Atli's greed and mistreatment of Gudrun are the sources of her hatred for him but, in Morris's poem, she does not retaliate *until* the lives of her brothers are taken. At this stage, Gudrun has nothing to live for and commits suicide as a result.[177] Morris's Gudrun does not commit the monstrous crime of infanticide, and the killing of her husband is retribution for the murder of her brothers. Hence, she is a far more sympathetic figure than her counterpart in the *Völsunga saga*.

The heroine of the poem, Brynhild, is portrayed by Morris in a sympathetic and realistic fashion as well. When she learns that she has been tricked into marrying Gunnar, Brynhild is 'sore encompassed by a tide of measureless woe' [178] and ultimately kills herself. Before she does so, however, she reacts to the news

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[174] Her mother, Grimhild, gives Gudrun a potion to make her forget her brothers' crime.
[175] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p. 306.
[176] Atli paid for Gudrun with 'thirty goodly knights, and seemly maidens, and many men besides'. *C.W*. Vol. VII, p. 391.
[177] Morris's poem ends with Gudrun's drowning. She is *not* rescued by King Jonakr as in the saga and this makes her a more tragic figure.
[178] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p. 220.

that she was deceived in a very human way: she insults her rival (Gudrun) and rebukes her betrayers, Gunnar and Sigurd. She also makes it clear to her husband, Gunnar, that she knows he has acted dishonourably:

> Till his heart hath heard her meaning at the at the golden bed he stares,
> And the last of the words she speaketh flit empty past his ears;
> For he knows that the tale of the night-tide hath been told and understood,
> And now of her shame was he deeming e'en worse than Brynhild would.[179]
>
> (ll.5-8)

Brynhild's own honour has been violated and for that, too, she incites her husband to revenge. In mediaeval Iceland, the most vicious way to offend a man was to remind him of heroic failure and Brynhild effectively emasculates Gunnar with a mocking address:

> "Thou art come, O King of the Niblungs; what mighty deed is to frame
> That thou wearest the cloudy harness, and the arms of the Niblung name?" [180]
>
> (ll.3-4)

Gunnar realises that his 'glory is dead',[181] and he is persuaded by Brynhild that Sigurd must die:

> She said: " Our garment is Shame, and naught the web shall rend,
> Save the day without repentance, and the deed that naught may amend."
> (ll.1-2)
> "To slay," she said, is the deed, to slay a King ere the morn,
> And the name is Sigurd the Volsung, my love and thy brother sworn"[182]
> (ll. 5-6)

Morris's Brynhild is not merely the archetypal vengeful woman, however. Morris does, nevertheless, provide his own version of the old adage of a 'woman scorned', but this refers to Gudrun:

> And for all the hand of the hero and the foresight of the wise,

[179] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p. 217.
[180] Ibid., p. 225
[181] Ibid., p. 225
[182] Ibid., p. 226.

> From the heart of a loving woman shall the death of men arise.[183]
> (ll. 29-30)

In calling for the death of the man she loves, Brynhild is abiding by the code of female honour. As has been previously mentioned, like all women in mediaeval Icelandic society, Brynhild was responsible for maintaining the honour of the household to which she belonged as well as her own personal honour.[184] The restoration of honour was paramount and she was prepared to risk whatever was necessary to effect this. She could not kill Sigurd herself,[185] so she goaded and shamed Gunnar into action.

In a tale where even minor female characters are noted for their wisdom,[186] Brynhild is preternaturally wise. She imparts her wisdom to Sigurd at their first meeting:

> And she told of the framing of all things, and the houses of the heaven;
> And she told of the star-worlds' courses, and how the winds be driven;
> And she told of the Norns and their names, and the fate that abideth the earth;
> And she told of the ways of King-Folk in their anger and their mirth;
> And she spake of the love of women, and told of the flame that burns,
> And the fall of mighty houses, and the friend that falters and turns,
> And the lurking blinded vengeance, and the wrong that amendeth wrong[187]
> (ll. 13-19)

There is a poignancy to the phrase 'wrong that amendeth wrong' given the fate of these star-crossed lovers. One of the most significant attributes of Brynhild is her faithfulness. Throughout the poem she is described as swan-like:

> But lo, as a swan on the sea spreads out her wings to arise,

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[183] Ibid., p. 205.
[184] Borovsky, p.32.
[185] In this she acted more honourably than Borghild, who poisoned Sinfiotli.
[186] Bera, Hogni's wife, and Glaumvor, Gunnar's second wife, both have dreams in which their husbands die due to Atli's treachery. This could be due to the gift of magic, of course, but, just as likely, both women have a degree of emotional intelligence and are perceptive judges of character.
[187] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p.128.
According to Morris, in the saga, Brynhild's 'wise redes' of counsel to Sigurd were taken from the 'Lay of Sigrdrifa', a poem in the *Poetic Edda. C.W.* Vol. VII, p. 284.

> From the face of the darksome ocean when the isle before her lies,
> So Brynhild arose from her throne [188]
>
> (ll. 3-5)

Swans are beautiful birds, but they are also symbols of purity and constancy.[189] Brynhild's love for Sigurd never diminishes despite his betrayal. Her part in the death of Sigurd is mitigated by the overwhelming despair she feels when she learns that she has been deceived into marriage with Gunnar by Sigurd. The tale of Brynhild and Sigurd was, according to Morris, a great love story:

> Of utter love defeated utterly,
> Of Grief too strong to give love time to die!

Morris's empathetic portrayal of Brynhild is juxtaposed with that of her mother-in-law, Grimhild, who is proud and guileful and manipulates people by the use of magic potions. Grimhild also rejoices in the power she has over men as these lines demonstrate:

> But Grimhild looked and was merry: and she deemed her life was great,
> And her hand a wonder of wonders to withstand the deeds of Fate:
> For she saw by the face of Sigurd and the token of his eyes
> That her will had abased the valiant and filled the faithful with lies.[190]
>
> (ll.15-18)

Here, Grimhild administers to Sigurd the drug that makes him forget Brynhild. Grimhild is also responsible for turning Sigurd into Gunnar's double so that he (Sigurd) may win Brynhild for Gunnar. In addition, it is Grimhild who suggests that Gunnar's brother, Guttorm, who had not sworn an oath of brotherhood with Sigurd, should be the one to kill him.

Arguably, Morris's depictions of the villains Grimhild and Borghild lack nuance, but these figures are the exceptions in *Sigurd*. Most of the female

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[188] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p. 135.
[189] Swans are monogamous and normally mate for life.
[190] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p. 166.

characters find themselves in wretched situations and behave in often vengeful, but still understandable, ways. Morris's empathy with the plight of women can, perhaps, be gleaned from his account of the numerous betrothals in the poem. The first of the tragic chain of events in *Sigurd,* for example, is Signy's expedient marriage to Siggeir. Although her father, King Völsung, nominally offers her the choice of refusing Siggeir, she is compelled by filial duty and family honour to agree to the match.[191] Signy's father and her brothers think only of the material advantages of her marriage to Siggeir:

> But the King's heart laughed within him and the King's sons deemed it good;
> For they dreamed how they fared with the Goths o'er ocean and acre and wood,
> Till all the north was theirs, and the utmost southern lands.[192]
>
> (ll. 21-23)

King Völsung loves his daughter, but he still welcomes the marriage even though her acquiescence is equivocal, to say the least:

> "I will sleep in a great king's bed, I will bear the lords of the earth,
> And the wrack and the grief of my youth-days shall be held for nothing worth."

It is clear that Signy's situation is representative of the plight of women in Morris's own times. In the Victorian patriarchal society, the majority of women were obliged to marry for social and economic reasons but were also constrained in their choice of husband by filial duty.[193] The circumstances of Signy's forced marriage are juxtaposed with the autonomy exercised by Hiordis, Sigurd's mother. She is given free choice and, despite her father's misgivings, she rejects the young handsome

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[191] This dutiful behaviour is exemplified by Ingibjorg in *Frithiof* the saga which was extremely popular in the Victorian period.

[192] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p.2.

[193] Morris's own wife, Jane, for example. Morris was later to describe marriage as little more than ' prostitution or a kind of legalised rape'. *Letters*, Vol II, p. 404.

King Lyngi in favour of the elderly Sigmund. The offspring of this (albeit short) marriage between the wise Hiordis and the brave Sigmund is Sigurd, the hope of the world:

> In the bed there lieth a man-child, and his eyes look straight on the sun,
> And lo, the hope of the people, and the days of a king are begun.[194]
> (ll. 35-36)

Compare this to the disastrous union of Signy and Siggeir which led to the destruction of all the Volsungs save the twins, Sigmund and Signy.

Borovsky has stated that the sagas of ancient times (*fornaldasogur)* typically have more women as main characters and have a more positive attitude to independent women than other types of saga.[195] This was, possibly, one of the reasons why Morris admired the *Völsunga Saga.* His omissions of some of the heinous crimes perpetrated by women in the saga, and the sympathetic explanation of the feelings and motivation of the female characters in *Sigurd* demonstrate Morris's empathy with the position of women in his own time. In an age where women were expected to be subservient to men and, as Plumwood has stated, 'domestic, asexual and civilising',[196] Morris portrays female characters who are both passionate and brave. By demonstrating their stoic adherence to a strict code of honour, furthermore, the women in *Sigurd* are as heroic as the men. Like their male counterparts, the heroines invariably choose death with honour over life with shame. In the poem, the subjugation of women, particularly with regard to marriage, plays a significant role in the tragic story. Ostensibly writing about fifth-century Iceland, Morris is effectively critiquing the patriarchal society of the nineteenth century where women were entirely dependent on, and ruled by, men.

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[194] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p. 62.
[195] Borovsky, p. 10.
[196] Plumwood, p. 20.

(iv) The importance of rewarding work.

Later in life, Morris wrote and lectured prolifically on the importance of work. Morris's conception of labour was fundamental to his eco-socialist principles which differed from other nineteenth-century socialist thought in one significant respect. In his lecture 'Useful Work versus Useless Toil' (1884), Morris states that whilst some socialists believed that it was 'enough that the worker should get the full produce of his work and that his rest should be abundant'[197] Morris thinks that work should be pleasurable, too. His view can be summarized by the following extract from another 1884 lecture 'Art and Socialism':

> It is right and necessary that all men should have work to do which shall be worth doing, and be of itself pleasant to do; and which should be done under such conditions as would make it neither over-wearisome nor over-anxious.[198]

Morris held as an ideal the pre-industrial period when craftsmen derived satisfaction from creating items that were beautiful or useful. This was, Morris believed, the antithesis of his own era, as industrialisation had resulted in the mass production of shoddy goods. Not only were the majority of these goods superfluous, but they were also produced by low-paid workers who were made to perform repetitive, unskilled tasks. The labour of an individual's hands had, as Emily Meredith puts it, 'no connection with the work of his imagination and intellect; artists who conceived ideas relied upon other men to implement them, while workmen seldom saw the final results of their own labor.'[199] Thus, in Victorian Britain, work for the majority was not fulfilling. It was instead a symbol of servitude as, under capitalism, the value of

[197] *C.W.* Vol. XXIII, p. 107.
[198] Ibid., p. 194.
[199] Emily Meredith, " Iceland and William Morris: In Search of the Whole". *The After Summer Seed,* p.71.

labour was continually reduced in the form of lower wages and poorer working conditions. Morris felt strongly that rewarding work was 'necessary to the life of man, as a token of his freedom and happiness'[200] and, as a consequence, should be available to all.

As we have seen, one of the things that attracted Morris to Iceland was its pre-industrial culture which had remained essentially unchanged since the period of Settlement. In his lecture 'The Early Literature of the North-Iceland' (1887), Morris observed that the early settlors led simple yet dignified lives that were reflected in the legends of the period:

> […] contrary to the absurd feeling of the feudal and hierarchical period manual labour was far from being considered a disgrace: the mythical heroes have often nearly as much fame given them for their skill as weapon-smiths as for their fighting qualities; it was necessary of course for a northman to understand sailing a ship, and the sweeps on board their long-ships or fighting craft were not manned by slaves but by the fighting men themselves;[…] in addition the greatest men lent a hand in the ordinary field, pretty much as they do in the Homeric poems: one chief is working in his hay-field at a crisis of his fortune; another is mending a gate, a third sowing his corn, his cloak and sword laid by in the corner of the field: another is a great house builder, another a shipbuilder:[201]

In turn, the importance of work to the individual and the community is emphasised throughout *Sigurd.* As quoted previously, the poem even opens with reference to this:

> There was a dwelling of Kings ere the world was waxen old;
> Dukes were the door-wards there, and the roofs were thatched
> with gold;
> Earls were the wrights that wrought it, and silver nailed its doors;
> Earls' wives were the weaving-women, queens' daughters strewed
> its floors
> And the masters of the song-craft were the mightiest men that cast
> The sails of the storm of battle adown the bickering blast.
> There dwelt men merry- hearted, and in hope exceeding great

[200] *C.W.* Vol XXIII, p. 205.
[201] LeMire, p. 184.

Met the good days and the evil as they went the way of fate:[202]
(ll. 1-8)

The Volsungs are introduced as a socially cohesive people who are happy in their work. Morris describes the Volsung hall as a communal residence built and maintained by all those who live in it. Dukes are the guards or 'door-wards', and the references to the 'gold' of the thatched roof and the 'silver' nails are evidence that the hall was the work of skilled craftsmen. The phrase, 'earls were the wrights that wrought it'[203] suggests that manual labour was not considered a menial occupation. Women, too, whatever their status, are contentedly engaged in work, either weaving or other household tasks.[204] Morris considered the contribution women made to the domestic sphere as of equal value to society as that of traditionally 'male' crafts such as carpentry, for example. In this view he deviated from nineteenth-century Marxist socialists who, like capitalists, tended to discount the worth of domestic employment. This essentially productivist view, that work only has a value if it produces something tangible was as anathema to Morris as it is to eco-socialists today. On this subject, Kate Soper has stated that feminists in particular, 'have pointed to the ways in which any economic theory (that of Marx, for example) that conceives of "production" as essentially a matter of producing objects or commodities will tend to overlook the productivity of domestic labour and skew perceptions of its contribution accordingly.' [205]

This non-productivist view of work is also seen in other aspects of the community portrayed by Morris. The men were, for example, as skilled in 'song-craft' as they were in seamanship. It is worth noting here that song-craft, or the art of

[202] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p.1.
[203] In his index of 'Things' to his translation of *Grettir the Strong* Morris describes the term 'earl' as 'a man next after the king in dignity'. *C.W.* Vol. VII, p. 273.
[204] 'Strewing' presumably means sweeping then laying fresh straw on the floor.
[205] Kate Soper, "Naturalized Woman and Feminized Nature". *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism.* ed. Laurence Coupe (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 141.

the skald, is often referred to in *Sigurd.* This attribute is, however, confined to the male protagonists. As Ennis states 'of the women [in the poem] only Signy ever sings ; this is when she changes shapes with the witch-wife in order to seduce Sigmund.'[206] The king of Lymdale, for example, introduces himself to Sigurd with these words:

> "For I am the ancient Heimir, and my cunning is of the harp,
> Though erst have I dealt in the sword-play while the edge of war was sharp."[207]
>
> (ll.2-3)

Heimir is a great warrior king but is still happy to entertain his people with music and song. Sigurd, too, is a skilled musician and story-teller; in the following extract we see him entertaining the Niblungs:

> Then they brought the harp to Sigurd, and he looked on the ancient man,
> And his hand sank into the strings, and a ripple over them ran,
> And he looked forth kind o'er the people, and all men on his glory gazed,
> And hearkened, hushed and happy, as the King his voice upraised;[208]
>
> (ll.13-16)

In fact the entire poem is, as Herbert Tucker states, 'studded with references to handicrafts for which Morris himself was famous.'[209] Indeed, the hero Sigurd has many accomplishments which were taught to him by his foster-father, Regin:

> So is Sigurd now with Regin, and he learns him many things;
> Yea all save the craft of battle, that men learned the sons of kings:
> The smithying sword and war-coat; the carving runes aright;
> The tongues of many countries, and soft speech for men's delight;
> The dealing with the harp-strings, and the winding ways of song.
> So wise of heart waxed Sigurd, and of body wondrous strong:
> And he chased the deer of the forest, and many a wood-wolf slew,
> And many a bull of the mountains: and the desert dales he knew,
> And the heaths that the wind sweeps over; and seaward would he fare,

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[206] Jane Ennis ed., *Sigurd the Volsung* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994), p. xxx. Ennis also notes that this aspect of Morris's poem ' may be intended to balance the ability of the women to weave and embroider and, in the case of Grimhild, to cast spells'.
[207] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p. 143.
[208] Ibid. p. 165.
[209] Herbert Tucker, *Epic: Britain's Heroic Muse 1790-1910.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 516.

Far out from the outer skerries, and alone the sea-wights dare.[210]
(ll. 8-17)

Like many Nordic heroes, Sigurd is self-sufficient. He makes his own weapons and armour, is a skilled mariner and hunts his own food.[211] Work for Sigurd, as it is for his fellows, is hard but rewarding.

In *Sigurd,* Morris describes the full and simple life that had existed in pre-industrial Mediaeval Iceland (and other early societies) in which creative and rewarding work was an integral part of human experience. In so doing, he effectively offers a critique of his contemporary society where the majority of people were alienated from work that was both unpleasant and unrewarding. The commodification of labour under capitalism was, Morris believed, inherently socially divisive. Capitalism , he argued, 'heeds one thing and only one, namely, what it calls a profit; which word has got to be used so conventionally that I must explain to you what it really means, to wit the plunder of the weak by the strong!'[212]

(v) The importance of the nature and the environment

As has been stated previously, Morris's socialist philosophy differed in several ways from the scientific Marxist ideology which prevailed in the Socialist Movement in the second half of the nineteenth century. One significant difference was with respect to the environment. As an industrial ideology, socialism was, like capitalism, inherently productivist and did not recognise ecological limits. As Lawrence Coupe has stated, Marx himself 'referred disparagingly to nature as a mere "tool house" or "larder" which capitalism is justified in exploiting given its necessary role in

[210] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p. 68.
[211] Whilst in Iceland, Morris took delight in hunting and cooking his own food.
[212] William Morris, "Art, Socialism and Environment" Quoted in *The Green Studies Reader* ed. L. Coupe (London: Routledge, 2000), p.32.

expanding the means of production.'[213] Morris rejected the view that nature was a resource to be exploited by humans and in so doing he falls into the romantic tradition of earlier writers, such as Wordsworth and Ruskin, who, like Morris, lamented the effect that industrialisation had on the environment. Morris believed that capitalism destroyed the beauty of the natural world by setting humanity against nature and this had a detrimental effect on the lives of all people. He did not, however, want capitalism replaced with a materialist socialism that would continue to exploit nature. He believed instead that the view of the natural world as a mere resource denied the possibility of a more personal and spiritual relationship with nature which was essential for everyone. Morris's concern for the environment was inextricably linked with his socialist values. His early eco-social principles make him a highly influential figure in the development of current eco-social thought. In this respect, as Peter Gould has argued that 'of all the social critics affected by the love of Nature William Morris was perhaps the most perceptive and also the most important.'[214] By examining how nature and people's relationship with the environment are represented in *Sigurd*, we can see that Morris is challenging the contemporary view of industrialism which, as Coupe puts it, 'assumes that nothing matters beyond technological progress'.[215]

Sigurd is replete with descriptions of nature which draw attention to the character of the protagonists. The scene in which Griper advises Sigurd, for example, reads as follows:

> Then great in the hall-fair-pillared the voice of Gripir arose,
> And it ran through the glimmering house-ways, and forth to the sunny close;
> There mid the birds' rejoicing went the voice of an o'er-wise King

[213] Coupe, *The Green Studies Reader,* p. 63.
[214] Peter C. Gould, *Early Green Politics: back to Nature, back to the land and socialism in Britain 1880-1890.* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1988), p. 151.
[215] Coupe, *The Green Studies Reader,* p. 4.

Like a wind mid-most winter come back to talk with spring.[216]
(ll. 1-4)

By giving 'wind' the ability to talk to spring, clearly a false premise or a pathetic fallacy,[217] Morris emphasises the idea that Gripir lives in symbiosis with nature. The benign Griper's home may be 'fair-pillared', but its beauty is enhanced by the presence of sunlight and thriving wildlife. This vibrant mood quickly disappears as Sigurd approaches the dwelling of the avaricious Regin, however:

And he rode through the sinking day to the walls of the kingly stead,
And came to Regin's dwelling when the wind was fallen dead,
And the great sun just departing: then blood-red grew the west,
And fowl flew home from the sea-mead, and all things sank to rest.[218]
(ll. 16-20)

Phrases such as 'sinking day', 'dead', 'departing' and 'blood-red' all convey a sense of foreboding as Sigurd sets out with Regin to slay Fafnir the Serpent. This mood of death and decay continues as they approach the place where Fafnir hoards his gold:

So up and up they journeyed, as ever they went
About the cold-slaked forges, o'er many a cloud-swept bent,
Betwixt the walls of blackness, by shores of fishless meres
And the fathomless desert waters,[219]
(ll.6-9)

Morris's reference to 'fishless meres' is reminiscent of the polluted rivers of his own age, particularly the Thames to which he referred in *News from Nowhere.*[220] By setting the greedy Fafnir in a decaying landscape, Morris effectively draws attention to the causal relationship between the acquisitive ethos of capitalism and the exploitation of the natural world.

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[216] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p. 99.
[217] Interestingly, John Ruskin, who coined the phrase 'pathetic fallacy', wrote in *Modern Painters* Vol. III (1856) that, 'when it [love of nature} is originally absent from any mind, that mind is in many other respects hard, worldly and degraded'. Quoted in *The Green Studies Reader,* p.29.
[218] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p.102.
[219] Ibid., p. 107.
[220] In *News from Nowhere,* thanks to the end of industrial pollution, salmon are again found in the Thames.

Conversely, the correlation between human goodness and unexploited nature occurs frequently throughout Morris's poem. Sigurd's first sight of Lymdale, for example, where he meets the wise and beautiful Brynhild, is described in idyllic terms:

> But lo, as he rides the meadows, before him now he sees
> A builded burg arising amid the leafy trees,
> And a white-walled house on its topmost with a golden roof-ridge done,
> And thereon the clustering dove-kind in the brightness of the sun.[221]
> (ll. 12-16)

This description of a 'white-walled' building enhancing rather than marring its natural surroundings is the very antithesis of Fafnir's abode. Indeed, Brynhild lives in symbiosis with nature as this description of her first appearance demonstrates:

> But a woman sights on the high-seat with gold about her head,
> And ruddy rings on her arms, and the grace of her girdle-stead;
> And sunlit in her rippled linen, and the green leaves lie at her feet,
> And e'en as a swan on the billow where the firth and the out-sea meet,[222]
> (ll.9-12)

Brynhild, like Sigurd, clearly has a high social standing: she dwells in a tower where she sits, bejewelled, on a 'high-seat'. The tower, however, is clearly open to the elements as Brynhild's gown is rippling in the breeze, and the reference to green leaves at her feet suggest she is in close touch with nature. The alignment of Brynhild with nature allows for an eco-feminist[223] reading of *Sigurd.* If nature is female, then there is an analogy between its domination and the subjugation of women by men.

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[221] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p.144.
[222] Ibid., p. 145.
[223] Kate Soper argues that the coding of nature as feminine is deeply entrenched in Western thought. See *The Green Studies Reader,* p. 142. For a discussion on the interaction between eco-feminism and eco-socialism, see Mary Mellor's essay, 'Ecofeminism and Ecosocialism: Dilemmas of Essentialism and Materialism' in *The Greening of Marxism,* pp. 251-267.

Morris's description of Brynhild's home, the peaceful Lymdale, is in stark contrast to the land of the warring Niblungs. Their well-fortified buildings seem to intrude on the surrounding landscape:

> Then how was the plain grown little 'neath that mighty burg of the ridge
> O'erhung by the cloudy mountains and the ash of another day,
> Whereto the slopes clomb upward until the green died out in the grey,
> And the grey in the awful cloud-land, where the red rents went and came
> Round the snows no summers minish and the far-off sunset flame:
> But lo, the burg at the ridge end![224]
>
> (ll. 1-6)

The gloomy, rather barren landscape depicted suggests that the Niblungs have exploited nature: green has been replaced by grey. The line 'o'erhung by the cloudy mountains and ash of another day' is reminiscent of a Victorian town or city polluted by smoke-emitting factories. The Niblungs, like the Victorians, are, to use Kenneth Burke's phrase, 'separated from [their] natural condition by instruments of [their] own making'.[225]Just as the Niblungs had destroyed their natural surroundings[226] by expanding their domain so, too, were Victorian capitalists destroying the environment in the pursuit of profit.

As has been discussed, the nineteenth century was a period of unprecedented economic growth. Britain was becoming an industrial rather than an agrarian society. As a consequence, cities and towns were expanding into the surrounding countryside in order to accommodate ever more industrial units and housing for factory workers. Morris frequently wrote about this erosion of the countryside in highly critical terms:

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[224] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p. 152.

[225] Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature and Method* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), p.16.

[226] It should be noted, however, that the Niblungs live on a volcanic island which, arguably, would account for the references to 'ash' and 'grey'. Nevertheless, Morris's description of the Niblungs' land is a striking contrast to the woodland idyll of Lymdale and, indeed, Griper's home.

> Think of the spreading sore of London swallowing up with its loathsomeness field and wood and heath without mercy and without hope, mocking our feeble efforts to deal even with its minor evils of smoke-laden sky and befouled river: the black horror and reckless squalor of our manufacturing districts, so dreadful to senses which are unused to them that it is ominous for the future of the race that any man can live among it in tolerable cheerfulness.[227]

In *Sigurd,* Morris frequently evokes a pastoral idyll[228] not merely for nostalgic reasons, but in order to have a framework within which to critique the present. Throughout the poem, Morris depicts organic rural communities in touch with the natural environment. In so doing, he invites a comparison with his own age where people live in crowded, polluted cities alienated from the natural world.

In *Sigurd,* the individual characters are frequently aligned with nature. Morris says this of Signy, for example:

> And her feet fared oft on the wild, and deep was her communing
> With the heart of the glimmering woodland.[229]
>
> (ll. 13-14)

The beauty of nature has a positive effect on the hero, too. As he journeys through an unspoilt countryside, Sigurd is carefree and happy:

> And he rideth fair and softly through the acres of the corn;
> The Wrath to his side is girded, but hid are the edges blue,
> As he wendeth his ways to the mountains, and rideth the horse-mead through.
> His wide grey eyes are happy, and his voice is sweet and soft,[230]
>
> (ll. 2-5)

His empathy with his natural surroundings continues throughout the poem. When he meets the people of Lymdale, for example, Sigurd declares:

> But meseems that the earth is lovely, and that each day springeth anew
> And beareth the blossom of hope, and the fruit of deeds to do.[231]

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[227] William Morris, "Art, Socialism and Environment". *The Green Studies Reader*, p. 34.
[228] Jane Ennis argues that, in this respect, *Sigurd* is firmly in the tradition of Romantic poetry, although it owes its subject matter to Old Norse poetry. *Ennis,* p. xxii.
[229] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p.10.
[230] Ibid., p.97.

(ll. 18-9)

It is not just individual characters who live in symbiosis with nature but, rather, whole communities. The folk of Lymdale, for instance, dwell in a woodland idyll and are self-sufficient:

> But most when their hearts were merry 'twas the joy of carle and quean
> To ride the depths of the oak-wood, and the thorny thicket green:
> (ll. 13-4)
> For the wood is their barn and storehouse, and their bower and feasting-hall,[232]
> (l.23)

This description is a stark contrast to that of the land of the Niblungs:

> O'erhung by the cloudy mountains and the ash of another day,
> Whereto the slopes clomb upwards till the green died out in the grey
> And the grey in the awful cloud-land, where the red rents went and came
> Round the snows no summers minish and the far-off sunset flame:[233]
> (ll. 1-4)

Throughout the poem, Morris's depiction of the landscape is, as Ennis observes, an expression of the character of its inhabitants.[234]

(vi) The folly of materialism

A central *leitmotif* of *Sigurd* is the destructive nature of the lust for gold. The desire to acquire the treasure incites men to commit treacherous acts, including patricide and fratricide. The dwarf, Fafnir, for example, murders his father, Reidmar, to obtain the gold. Fafnir then mutates into a serpent whose sole *raison d'être* is the protection of his horde. He becomes the 'Wallower on the Gold'[235] in sharp contrast to the golden Sigurd who slays him. In Morris's poem, the treasure is 'the seed of

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[231] Ibid., p.142.
[232] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p.141.
[233] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p.153.
[234] Ennis, p. xxii.
[235] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p.88.

woe to the world'.[236] The lust for gold in *Sigurd* is, arguably, a paradigm for the ever increasing materialism of Morris's own era. Just as all the characters in *Sigurd* who desire riches above all else exploit others until they, themselves, are ultimately destroyed, so, too, was the acquisitive nature of capitalism devastating Victorian society.

One of the central tenets of eco-socialism is that society should only produce what is reasonable for material well-being without destroying nature. This challenges the productivist nature of capitalism where, as Hans Magnus Enzensberger has stated, 'social want is created alongside increasing social wealth.'[237] Socialism does not in itself eradicate materialism or 'commodity fetishism'[238] if it merely transfers ownership from private capitalists to the state. The implementation of *eco*-socialism, however, would change society's needs by, as Pepper has argued, 'redefining wealth along William Morris's diverse lines which includes a bottom line of reasonable material well-being to all.'[239] Wealth, according to Morris, 'is what Nature gives us and what a reasonable man can make out of the gifts of Nature for his reasonable use'.[240]

Throughout *Sigurd,* Morris's contempt for the vulgar materialism of his own era is evident. The hero, Sigurd, equally disdains material riches. Morris uses the imagery of gold in contrasting ways. It has positive connotations in that Sigurd is described as golden signifying his innate goodness. Conversely, the malevolent characters in the poem long to acquire gold (which eventually destroys them). On this topic Stephen Sossaman has stated that 'all heroes are presented in an aspect of gold[…] most of the evil characters lust after gold, so that the color becomes the

[236] Ibid., p. 83.
[237] Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'A Critique of Political Ecology'. *The Green Studies Reader,* p.45.
[238] A phrase coined by Rosanna Rosanda in 1973. *The Green Studies Reader,* p. 36.
[239] Pepper, p. 233.
[240] 'Useful Work versus Useless Toil'. *C.W.* Vol. XXIII, p.103.

identifying mark of the good and the objective of the evil people.'[241] It is true that Sigurd slays Fafnir and takes his gold, but only because Regin guilefully persuades him that he (Regin) wants to avenge his father. As the following passage suggests, Sigurd has no desire for the gold:

> "Thou shalt have thy will and the treasure, and shall take the curse on thine head
> If a curse the gold enwrappeth: but the deed will I surely do,
> For today the dreams of my childhood hath bloomed in my heart anew:
> And I long to look on the world and the glory of the earth,
> And to deal in the dealings of men, and garner the harvest of worth."[242]
> (ll. 18-22)

In the above lines Sigurd acquiesces to Regin's request, but his motivation is not material gain. He is uninterested in the treasure as he views gold as cursed. He does not want to acquire riches rather he wants to 'garner the harvest of worth' by earning the respect and admiration of his fellows. Sigurd desires to be free to enjoy the beauty of nature (the glory of earth) and live in fellowship with other people (to deal in the dealings of men). As he sets out on his journey to slay Fafnir, Sigurd tells Regin that he shall have his gold but that it will come at a cost:

> With the blood and the might of thy brother thine hunger shalt thou sate[243]
> (l. 20)

Morris, through Sigurd, makes the point that the acquisition of material riches inevitably leads to the exploitation of other people. Regin believes he will be rich and powerful, but only after his brother is dead and he possesses his gold. Regin dreams that he is 'the Master and the new world's fashioning-lord.'[244] The latter phrase could be a description of a Victorian industrialist.

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[241] Stephen Sossaman, 'William Morris's "Sigurd the Volsung" and the Pre-Raphaelite Visual Aesthetic', *Pre-Raphaelite Review* 1/2, (1978), pp. 81-90, (p.89).
[242] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p.74.
[243] Ibid., p. 106.
[244] Ibid., p. 116.

Throughout Morris's epic poem, men compete for the gold of Andvari. The Niblung Gunnar, for example, is motivated to a certain extent by sexual jealousy, but the catalyst for his treachery towards Sigurd is the thought of 'measureless Gold.'[245] Encouraged by his mother, Grimhild, Gunnar plots to murder Sigurd in order to obtain the gold:

> So Gunnar hearkens and hearkens, and he saith, It is idle and worse:
> If the oath of my brother be broken, let the earth then see to the curse![246]
> (ll. 23-4)

Gunnar is prepared to exploit other people as well as nature for material gain. 'Let the earth then see to the curse!' The analogy in the poem between the desire for gold and the materialism engendered by Victorian capitalism continues throughout *Sigurd.* Atli, the king of the Huns, is described as one:

> Who craved the utmost increase of all that kings desire;
> Who would reach his hand to the gold as it ran in the ruddy fire,
> Or go down to the ocean-pavement to harry the people beneath,
> Or cast up the sword at the Gods, or bid the friendship of death.[247]
> (ll. 1-4)

Atli is, arguably, the ultimate capitalist driven by the desire to acquire ever more wealth, regardless of the consequences to others:

> Great are his gains in the world, and few men may his might withstand,
> But he weigheth sore on his people and cumbers the hope of his land;[248]
> (ll. 3-4)

Morris's description of Atli could equally be applied to Victorian industrialists who competed for market domination by exploiting their workers and the environment.

The destructive nature of materialism is apparent when it is juxtaposed with Morris's descriptions of those who live a simple life, unburdened by the desire for

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[245] Ibid., p.204.
[246] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p.204.
[247] Ibid., p.246.
[248] Ibid., p.255.

material gain. Sigurd 'laughs to scorn the treasure'[249] and Brynhild, too, disparages material wealth:

> Yet I sleep and remember Sigurd; and I wake and naught is there,
> Save the golden bed of the Niblungs , and the hangings fashioned fair:[250]
> (ll. 12-13)

It is not only the central characters who eschew material possessions. Before she kills herself, Brynhild offers her handmaidens the riches she had inherited from her forefathers but her servants refuse the offer, as these lines demonstrate:

> They brought them mid their weeping, but none put forth a hand
> To take that wealth desired, the spoils of many a land:
> (ll. 21-22)

Another case in point is the good people of Lymdale who lead a simple life in harmony with one another and with nature, unencumbered by the desire for material gain:

> For as then no other warfare do the lords of Lymdale know,
> And the axe-age and the sword-age seem dead a while ago,
> And the age of cleaving of shields, and of brother by brother slain,
> And bitter days of the whoredom, and the hardened lust of gain;
> But man to man may hearken, and he that soweth reaps,[251]
> (ll.29-33)

In the past, the Lymdale folk had clearly been war-mongering and materialist, in thrall to the 'hardened lust of gain'. Morris's use of the word 'whoredom' indicates the degenerate nature of their previous mode of living. A new social order, however, had emerged as the people of Lymdale had chosen to lead less complicated lives, untrammelled by the desire for material riches. This was the kind of society Morris, himself, hoped for.

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[249] Ibid., p.160.
[250] Ibid., p.213.
[251] *C.W.* Vol. XII, p.143.

In Morris's *Sigurd*, the gold of Andvari could be read as a metaphor for materialism. In the poem, all those who compete to possess the treasure exploit other people, the environment and themselves. Just as a 'flame of bitter trouble' sprang from the longing for the Andvari treasure, so, too, the rampant materialism of Morris's own age, an inevitable consequence of capitalism, was destroying both the physical and mental well-being of all. Morris believed that people's needs could be modest if, as Pepper has stated, 'they are self-defined rather than shaped by the pressures of a materialist society.'[252] Just as Hogni the Niblung becomes proud and glorious again when he casts the treasure into a deep lake, so too would life in Morris's age become a pleasure if people eschewed materialism.

(V) Conclusion

The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs was the last epic poem Morris wrote prior to his public political activism. He was inspired by not only the great Icelandic sagas, but also by the egalitarian, pre-industrial society that still existed in nineteenth-century Iceland. Ostensibly writing about fifth-century Iceland Morris does, in effect, critique his own age. The eco-social values that he was later to articulate are all emphasised in *Sigurd.* In addition to the integrity of the individual, there is a strong community ethos where the weak are cared for, not exploited, by the strong. Morris longed for a pre-industrial classless society where both men and women had control over their lives. His ideal society was characterised by common ownership, one where people lived in harmony with nature. The destruction of the Niblungs by their own lust for gold is a paradigm for the societal *malaise* engendered by the materialism of the capitalist system of production in the

[252] Pepper, p. 146.

nineteenth century. Morris believed that the materialist world in which he found himself (which still exists today) was detrimental to human existence. He also thought, as Pepper has pointed out, that the value of things 'resided in their *use* in terms of function, ability to please aesthetically or the appeal to the intellect or the senses of humour: virtually any way, that is, except as *items* of exchange to realise profits.'[253]

[253] Pepper, p.45.

(V) Conclusion

William Morris was a highly significant political and cultural figure of the nineteenth century and, as a consequence, there have been many books and articles about his life and work. These publications range from biographies to those focusing on his contribution to the arts and crafts movement, his literary output and political philosophy. This thesis has attempted to contribute to the already large body of Morris scholarship by exploring the link between Morris's early poetry and prose and his later political views. Morris, of course, 'became' a socialist before he knew anything about the writings of Marx. The independence of Morris's thinking is borne out, not least, by the fact that he never found a political party entirely in accord with his views.[1] His brand of socialism was radical as well as 'green', and could best be described today as eco-socialism. Through a critical reading of his contributions to the *OCM* in 1856 to *Sigurd* in 1876, it has been demonstrated that from an early age Morris had concerns about the social injustice and the destruction of the environment caused by the rampant capitalism of his time and that these concerns are expressed in his poetry and prose.

In Chapter One Morris's childhood and education and early literary influences were examined. Following an eco-social reading of Morris's *The Defence Of Guenevere and Other Poems* and some of his contributions to the *OCM,* with particular reference to *Piers Plowman,* it was concluded that Morris's nascent socialist and environmental concerns were acquired in childhood through the wider family ethos of consideration for others, his love of nature and his close relationship with his two elder sisters. These early principles were developed at Oxford and influenced by the ideas of Carlyle, Kingsley and Ruskin but, arguably, they reached a

[1] In 1890 Morris eventually formed the independent Hammersmith Socialist Party which held meetings in his house at 26 Upper Mall.

hiatus when Morris began his close involvement with the Pre-Raphaelite painters, in particular Rossetti, who was, according to Morris, apolitical. Morris's earliest poetry and prose do contain expressions of what could be termed eco-social beliefs in embryonic form, although it is reasonable to conclude that such concerns are expressed more overtly in Morris's earlier works published in the *OCM* than in *The Defence* volume which Morris compiled, for the most part, *after* he met Rossetti. The extent to which Morris's early eco-social views could be said to be Pre-Raphaelite in origin, therefore, is highly debatable. It could be argued then, that although Morris's early poetry and prose are products of *his* Pre-Raphaelite period, the eco-social views expressed therein are only tangentially related to the wider Movement itself.

The second chapter of this thesis focused on the period of Morris's life which was, arguably, the happiest. He lived with his wife in a house which he was able to furnish in a mediaeval style with the help of his artistic 'set'. The paucity of well-designed furniture available during that period led him to the practical action of forming 'The Firm'. Through a close reading of the manuscript of the unpublished (and incomplete) *Scenes from the Fall of Troy*, in particular the amendments made by Morris, and in addition *The Life and Death of Jason,* it was shown that, despite his own comfortable life, Morris did have beliefs that could best be described as eco-social. Embedded in these poems, as in his earlier works, are expressions of Morris's love of nature, chivalric values, such as fraternity and honour, and an empathy for women. In addition, there is a sense of Morris's deep unease about the nature of a capitalist society which, as he was later publically to argue, engendered desires in industrialists and *entrepreneurs* which are linked to the profit imperative and which, inevitably, lead to the exploitation of other people as well as of the environment.

The Earthly Paradise, the epic poem that was published and largely written during a very difficult period of Morris's life was the subject of Chapter Three. In this section of the thesis the close, and hitherto unidentified, correlation between Old English elegies and *The Earthly Paradise* is identified. It was asserted that 'The Prologue' is, in effect, Morris's personal elegy and is heavily influenced by some of the poetry of the *Exeter Book*. It was further argued that, through his adaptation of the legends of the past and his depiction of the unspoiled landscape of pre-industrial lands, Morris offers a critique of Victorian capitalism that could best be described as eco-social. Morris evokes in this epic poem non-hierarchical communities in which neither the environment nor people, especially women, are exploited and where all people have their fair share of rewarding labour and are able to enjoy their surroundings, whether natural or man-made.

The final Chapter concerns Morris's 'Icelandic Period' and *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs,* the last epic poem he published prior to his public political activism. His engagement with the sagas, as well as the effect that his two trips to Iceland had on him was examined in detail. In Iceland Morris saw for himself the egalitarian, pre-industrial society which historically had a more enlightened view of the role of women. By means of a close reading of *Sigurd* it was demonstrated that the eco-social values that Morris was later to articulate are already apparent in this epic poem. These are, of course, in addition to the integrity of the individual, a strong community ethos where the weak are cared for, not exploited, by the strong. Morris longed for a pre-industrial, classless society where both men and women had control over their lives and could engage in rewarding work. His ideal society was characterised by common ownership, one where people lived in harmony with each other as well as with nature.

The eco-social beliefs expressed by Morris in his early works examined in this thesis lay the foundations of his later political writings. In the 1880s Morris publically called for a rejection of capitalism which was, he believed, inherently socially divisive. He advocated a radical restructuring of society along socialist lines. In his lecture 'Useful Work versus Useless Toil' (1884), for example, Morris argued that a 'true' society would rest on equality of condition:

> No man would be tormented for the benefit of another – nay no one man would be tormented for the benefit of Society. Nor, indeed, can that order be called Society which is not upheld for the benefit of every one of its members.[2]

The above is, of course, the main tenet of socialism but Morris's type of socialism differed from many of his Marxist contemporaries in several ways. For example, although Marx did, on occasions, recognise the qualitative value of the natural world to human well-being, ultimately he (like capitalists) viewed nature as a commodity to be controlled and exploited by mankind. Morris, however, called for a re-thinking of society's relationship with the natural environment. He advocated living in harmony with nature which should be managed, not exploited, for the collective good. Morris also thought that society should re-examine its relationship with the items it produced. He felt that people's needs would be modest if self-defined rather that shaped by the pressures of a materialist society. There was an inherent wastefulness in the productivism of the capitalist market which created, according to Morris, a 'false demand'.[3]

In addition, Morris consistently emphasised the importance of creative activity and pointed to the need for everyone to have useful work that gave them both physical and mental pleasure, as well as producing beautiful and useful items. He

[2] Quoted in A.L. Morton, p.95.
[3] 'Useful Work Versus Useless Toil', Morton, p.98.

believed that a society liberated by socialism would think about art (in its broadest sense) and would create an attractive environment for all, not just a few. To Morris, the artistic mode of production by craftsmen (and women) was central to the ideal society he envisaged. Marx, on the other hand, always favoured industrialism and was rather contemptuous of the artisan mode of production which he referred to as 'craft-idiocy'[4]. A further feature which distinguishes Morris's type of socialism from that of his contemporaries, is his attitude to women. Marx and many of Morris's socialist colleagues certainly espoused the cause of female employees but ignored the fact that women were exploited as workers *and as women,* in marriage and familial relationships. As we have seen, by his sympathetic treatment of women in his early works and his later public statements, Morris acknowledged both those areas of exploitation.

The focus of this thesis has been on Morris's poetry and prose written *before* he publically declared himself a socialist. Two possibilities for further research beckon, however. Firstly, it would be interesting to move forward and complete an eco-social reading of the nine romances published by Morris after he joined the Democratic Federation in 1883. There have, of course, been many 'green' critiques of *News from Nowhere* (1890), the fourth of these romances but, to date, there has been no major eco-social reading of the other eight. This may be, as Phillippa Bennett has stated, because of the 'uncertain position'[5] they occupy in Morris's canon. This proposed area of research would consist of an examination of the romances (in chronological order) beginning with Morris's tale of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, *A Dream of John Ball* (1888),[6] and concluding with *The Sundering*

[4] Keekok Lee, *Social Philosophy and Ecological Scarcity* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.277.
[5] Phillippa Bennett, 'Rejuvenating Our Sense of Wonder: The Last Romances of William Morris'. *William Morris in the Twenty-First Century*, pp. 209-228, (p.209).
[6] See Chapter One of this thesis.

Flood (1897) which Morris completed shortly before his death in 1896. It would be interesting to discover if there are any expressions of Morris's eco-social philosophy in the romances written before *News from Nowhere*, *The Roots of the Mountains* (1889), for example, as well as those published after 1890, for instance, *The Well at the World's End* (1896).

Another possible area for future research concerns the idea of Morris as a proto-feminist. This is a theory about which there has been much debate. Morris's attitude to women was certainly enlightened for his era. He did not see women as possessions of men, and he had many female friends whom he treated as intellectual equals (Georgiana Burne-Jones, for example). In addition, as Anna Mason has recently stated, 'Morris really nurtured his daughters' aspirations to have careers and to be artists.'[7] Morris's portrayal of women performing largely domestic tasks in *News from Nowhere*, however, seems to challenge the theory that he was a feminist.[8] It would be interesting, therefore, to explore this apparent dichotomy by attempting a wholly eco-feminist reading of Morris's early writings.

While it may be a cliché to argue that an historical figure lived through a period of immense social change, in Morris's case, this claim is based in fact. In a recent address to The William Morris Society, Caroline Lucas, for instance, cited the transformation of the birthplace of Morris during his lifetime as a microcosm of nineteenth-century Britain. Lucas notes that 'in 1834 Walthamstow's economy was agricultural. In 1896 it has already become the home of the first motor car manufactured in England and, within a few more years, the first British-built aircraft

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[7] Quoted in Jeremy Deller, *Love is Enough: William Morris and Andy Warhol* (Oxford, Modern Art Oxford, 2014), 31. Anna Mason is Chief Curator of the William Morris Gallery, London.
If Jenny Morris had not become so unwell, she would have gone to university and May was, of course, a gifted designer. As Hilary Laucks Walter has observed, however, 'May's accomplishments are often overshadowed by those of her father'. 'Another Stitch to the Legacy of William Morris: May Morris's Designs and Writings on Embroidery'. *William Morris in the Twenty-First Century*, pp. 73-89.

[8] See Chapter One of this thesis, pp. 42-3.

took to the skies over Walthamstow marshes'.[9] Many of these technological innovations brought great prosperity to certain sections of Victorian society, but Morris was deeply troubled by the effects that many of these changes, particularly the burgeoning industrialisation, had on the lives of people as well as the environment. During the 1880s and 1890s he publically advocated an end to capitalism, an economic system which, he believed, perpetuated class hierarchies and exploited both people and nature. Morris's ideas were expressed, however, in his art and literature as well as his political writings. He believed that everyone, not just a privileged élite, should be able to create and enjoy art. Morris's way of thinking not only influenced his contemporaries but continues to inspire the work of many in the twenty-first century.[10] A very striking visual example of this is Jeremy Deller's *We Sit Starving Amidst Our Gold* (2013).[11] This mural depicts Morris as a colossus throwing the luxury yacht of the Russian 'oligarch' Roman Abramovich into a Venetian lagoon. (Abramovich had selfishly moored his yacht, an ostentatious symbol of his wealth, outside the Venice Biennale 2011).

In an age where there are grave concerns about the depletion of the earth's natural resources and continuing social inequalities, Morris's ideas still have a profound resonance today. In 1979, A. L. Morton noted that 'the working out of a truly self-renewing ecological basis for the earth may well be the next great task before humanity, a task impossible for capitalism, possible though still not easy for Socialism.'[12]

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[9] Caroline Lucas, *William Morris in the Twenty-First Century* (London: William Morris Society, 2013), p.11. Caroline Lucas is the Green Party MP for Brighton Pavilion and former leader of the Green Party.

[10] In 2014, for example, The National Portrait Gallery staged an exhibition curated by Fiona MacCarthy, entitled *Anarchy and Beauty: William Morris And His Legacy 1860-1960.*

[11] See Figure 22. This mural, painted by Stuart Sam Hughes, was part of Deller's *English Magic* exhibition at the British Pavilion of Venice Biennale in 2013.

[12] Morton, p.30.

This remains true of the twenty-first century, where greed and exploitation have never been more endemic. The deep insight of William Morris can help us with the challenge of creating what he advocated, a fairer, greener society. An earthly paradise, perhaps?

Appendix I
A list of all the books printed at the Kelmscott Press in order of issue date[1]

William Morris, *The Story Of The Glittering Plain*

William Morris, *Poems By The Way*

Wilfred Scawen Blunt*, The Love-Lyrics & Songs of Proteus*

John Ruskin, 'The Nature of Gothic' a chapter of *The Stones of Venice*

William Morris, *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems*

William Morris, *A Dream of John Ball and A King's Lesson*

Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*

Raoul Lefevere, *The Recuyell Of The Historyes Of Troye*

J.W. Mackail, *Biblia Innocentium: Being The Story of God's Chosen People Before The Coming Of Our Lord Jesus Christ Upon The Earth, Written Anew For Children*

William Caxton, *The History Of Reynard The Foxe*

F.S. Ellis, *The Poems Of William Shakespeare, Printed After The Original Copies Of Venus And Adonis, 1593*

William Morris, *News From Nowhere: Or An Epoch Of Rest*

William Caxton, *The Order Of Chivalry*

George Cavendish, *The Life Of Thomas Wolsley, Cardinal Archbishop Of York*

William Caxton, *The History Of Godefrey of Boloyne And Of The Conquest Of Iherusalem*

Sir Thomas More, *Utopia*

Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Maud, A Monodrama*

William Morris, *Gothic Architecture: A Lecture For The Arts And Crafts Exhibition Society*

William Meinhold, *Sidonia The Sorceress*

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ballads And Narrative Poems*

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[1] For an annotated list of books printed see H.Halliday Sparling*, The Kelmscott Press and William Morris Master Craftsman* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1924), pp. 148-174.

William Morris, trans. *The Tale Of King Florus And The Fair Jehane*

William Morris, *The Story Of The Glittering Plain Which Has Been Also Called The Land Of Living Men Or The Acre Of The Undying*

William Morris, trans., *Of The Friendship Of Amis And Amile*

Dante Gabrielle Rossetti, *Sonnets And Lyrical Poems*

F.S. Ellis ed., *The Poems Of John Keats*

Algernon C. Swinburne, *Atalanta In Calydon: A Tragedy*

William Morris, trans., *The Tale Of The Emperor Coustans And Of Over Sea*

William Morris, *The Wood Beyond The World*

Oliver Wardrop trans., *The Book Of Wisdom And Lies.*

F.S. Ellis, ed., *The Poetical Works Of Percy Bysshe Shelley*

F.S. Ellis, ed., *Psalmi Penitentiales*

Charles Fairfax Murray, ed., *Epistola De Contemptu Mundi Di Frate Hieronymo Da Ferrara Dellordine De Frati Predicatori La Quale Manda Ad Elena Buonccorsi Sua Made, Per Consolarla Della Morte Del Fratell, Suo Zio*

William Morris and A.J. Wyatt, *The Tale Of Beowulf*

J.O. Halliwell, ed., *Syr Perecyvelle Of Gales*

William Morris, *The Life And Death Of Jason, A Poem*

F.S. Ellis, ed., *The Poetical Works Of Percy Bysshe Shelley* Volume II

William Morris, *Child Christopher And Goldilind The Fair*

F.S. Ellis, ed., *The Poetical Works Of Percy Bysshe Shelley* Volume III

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Hand And Soul*

F.S. Ellis, ed., *Poems Chosen Out Of The Works Of Robert Herrick*

F.S. Ellis, ed., *Poems Chosen Out Of The Works Of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*

William Morris, *The Well At The World's End*

F.S. Ellis, ed., *The Works Of Geoffrey Chaucer*

S.C, Cockerell., *Laudes Baetae Mariae Virginis*

William Morris., *The Earthly Paradise* Volume II

The following were issued after Morris's death in October 1896:

F.S. Ellis, ed., *The Floure And The Leafe, And The Boke Of Cupide, God Of Love, Or The Cuckow And The Nightingale.*

Edmund Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calender: Conteyning Twelve Aeglogues, Proportionable To The Twelve Monethes*

William Morris, *The Earthly Paradise* Volume III

William Morris, *The Earthly Paradise* Volume IV

William Morris, *The Earthly Paradise* Volume V

William Morris, *The Earthly Paradise* Volume VI

William Morris, *The Earthly Paradise* Volume VII

William Morris, *The Water Of The Wondrous Isles*

William Morris, *The Earthly Paradise* Volume VIII

Lord Berners' trans., *Froissart's Chronicles Two Trial Pages*

F.S. Ellis, ed., *Sire Degrevaunt*

F.S. Ellis, ed., *Syr Ysambrace*

S.C. Cockerell, ed., *Some German Woodcuts Of The Fifteenth Century*

William Morris, *The Story Of Sigurd The Volsung And The Fall Of The Niblungs*

William Morris, *The Sundering Flood*

William Morris, *Love Is Enough, Or The Freeing Of Pharamond: A Morality*

S.C. Cockerell, ed., *A Note By William Morris On His Aims In Founding The Kelmscott Press.*

Appendix II
List of Morris's contributions to the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*(1856)[2]

'The Story of the Unknown Church' (tale)	January
'Winter Weather' (poem)	January
'The Churches of Northern France No 1 - Shadows of Amiens'	February
'A Dream' (a tale)	March
'Men and Women' by Browning (review)	March
'Frank's Sealed Letter' (tale)	April
'Riding Together' (poem)	May
'Gertha's Lovers' chapters 1-3 (tale)	July
'Hands' (poem)	July
'Death the Avenger & Death the Friend' (tale)	August
'Svend and his Brethren' (tale)	August
'Gertha's Lovers' chapters 4 & 5 (tale)	August
'Lindenborg Pool' (tale)	September
'The Hollow Land' chapters 1 & 2. (tale)	September
'The Chapel in Lyoness' (poem)	September
'The Hollow Land' chapter 3 (tale)	October
'Pray but One Prayer for Me' (poem)	October
'Golden Wings' (tale)	December

[2] Source: J-M Baïssus, 'Morris and the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine', JWMS* Vol. 5.2 (Winter 1982), pp. 2-13.

Appendix III - Illustrations

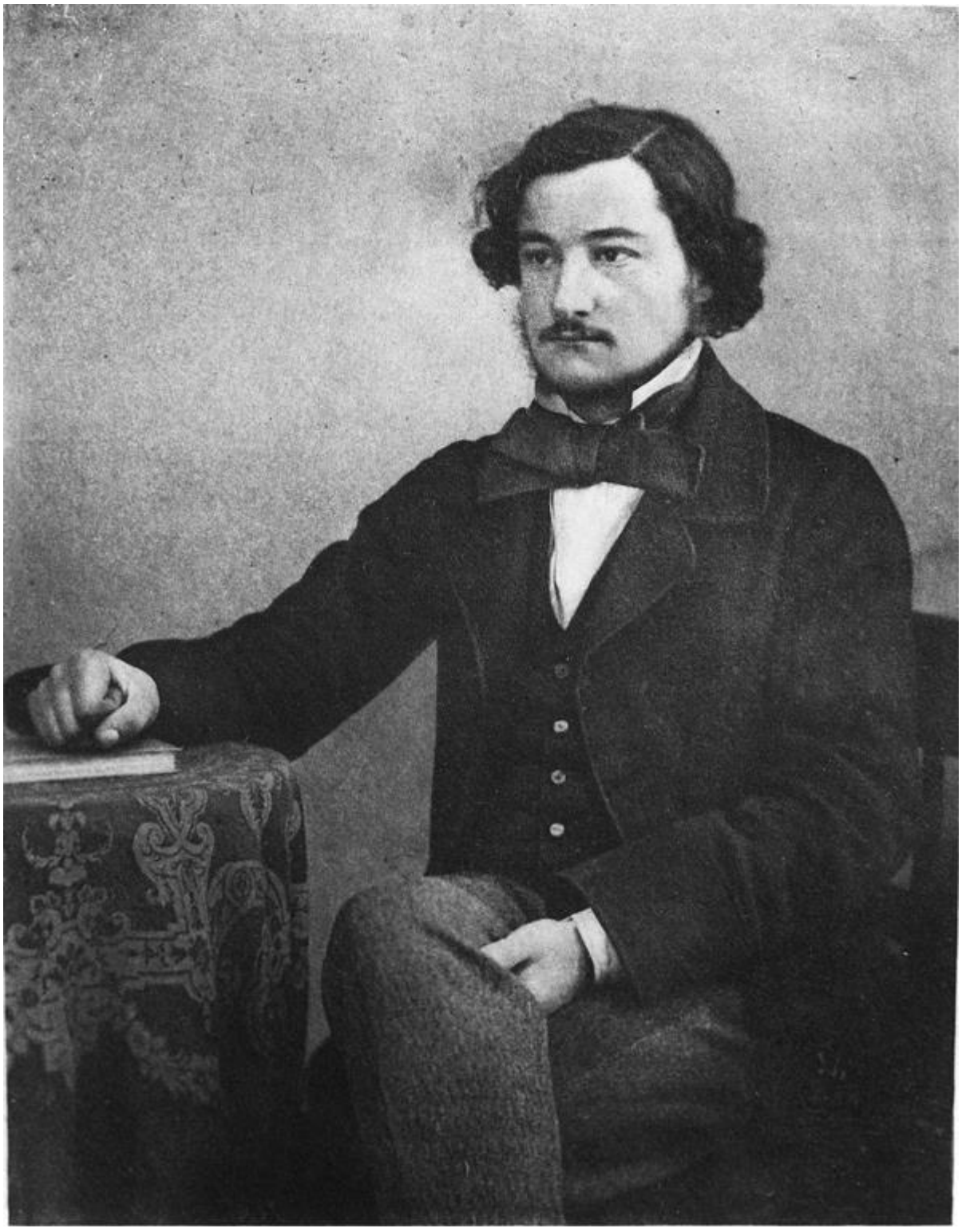

Figure 1. William Morris aged 23 (1857). Photographer unknown.
By permission of William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest.

Figure 2. *La Belle Iseult* by William Morris (1857-8)
Also known as *Queen Guenevere* this portrait of Jane Burden is Morris's only extant oil painting.
By Permission of Tate Britain.

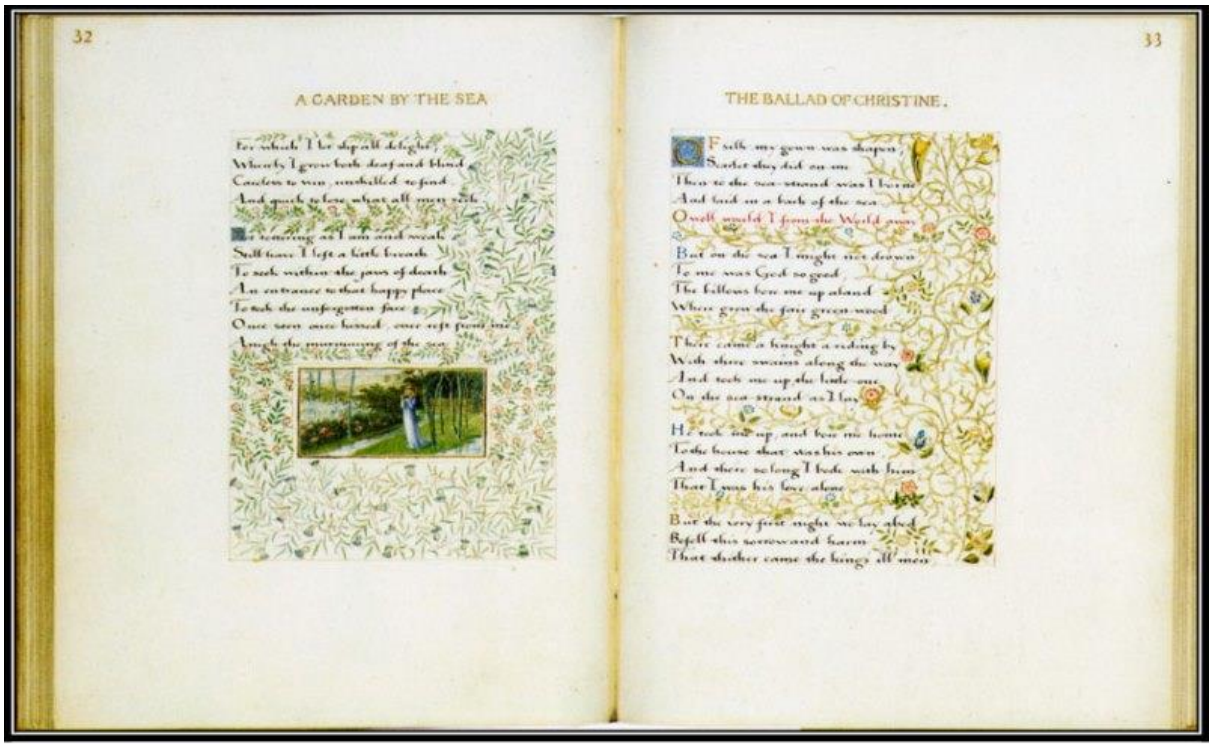

Figure 3. *The Book of Verse* (1870) by William Morris.
This is the volume of handwritten poems gifted to Georgiana Burne-Jones during an emotionally difficult period in his life. Morris also illustrated the book after the style of a mediaeval manuscript.

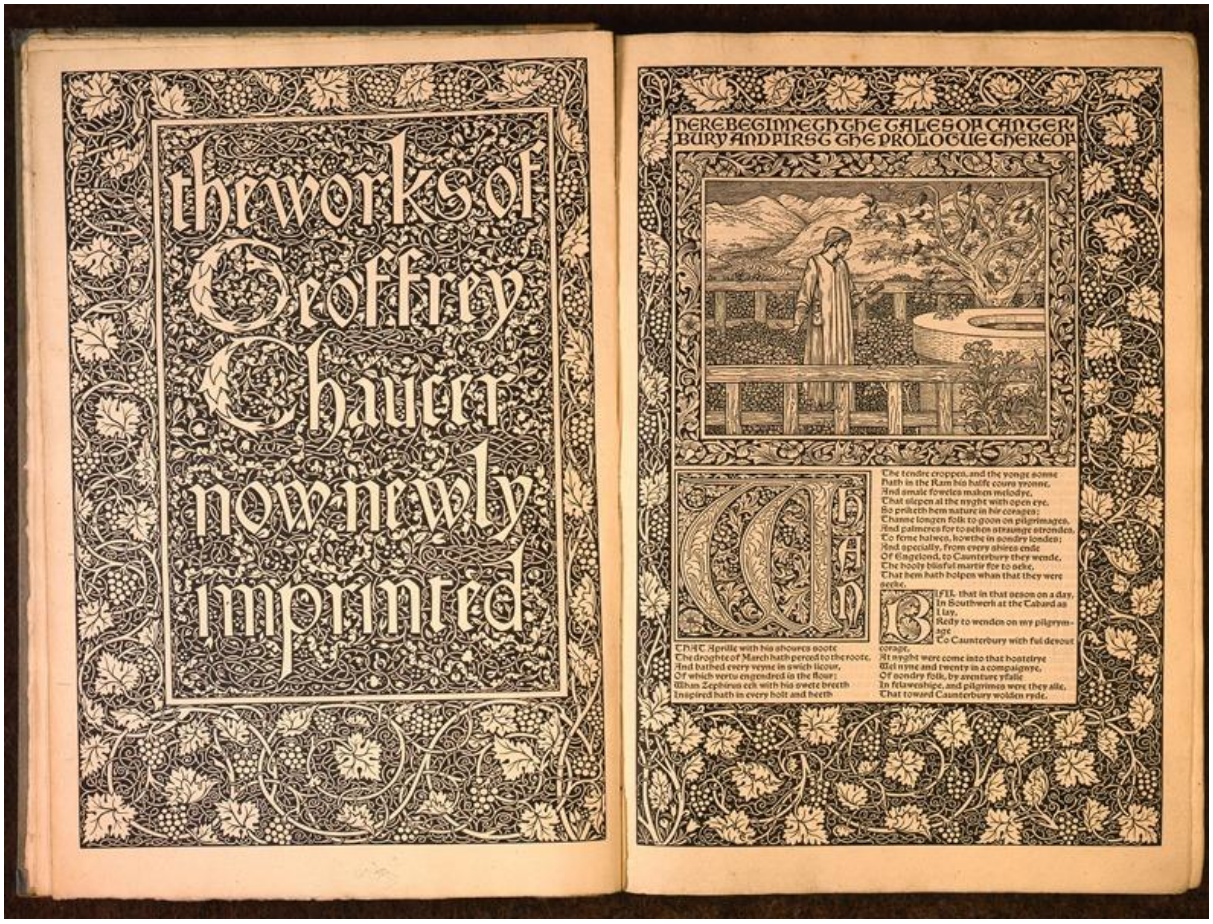

Figure 4. *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* edited by F.S. Ellis and with woodcuts designed by Edward Burne-Jones was published by the Kelmscott Press in June 1896, shortly before Morris's death in October. The *Kelmscott Chaucer*, as it is known, was one of the most important achievements of the Press. With his customary attention to detail Morris designed a special type (Chaucer type) for this volume. The entire project took five years to complete. Morris's own copy is now at Exeter College, Oxford.

Figure 5. Garden of Pleasure from the *Roman de la Rose* by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. Harley MS. 4425. British Library.

Figure 6. Inspired by the gardens at Red House, *Trellis* (1862) was one of Morris's first wallpapers. The birds were drawn by Philip Webb. Morris later decorated his bedroom at Kelmscott House with *Trellis* wallpaper.

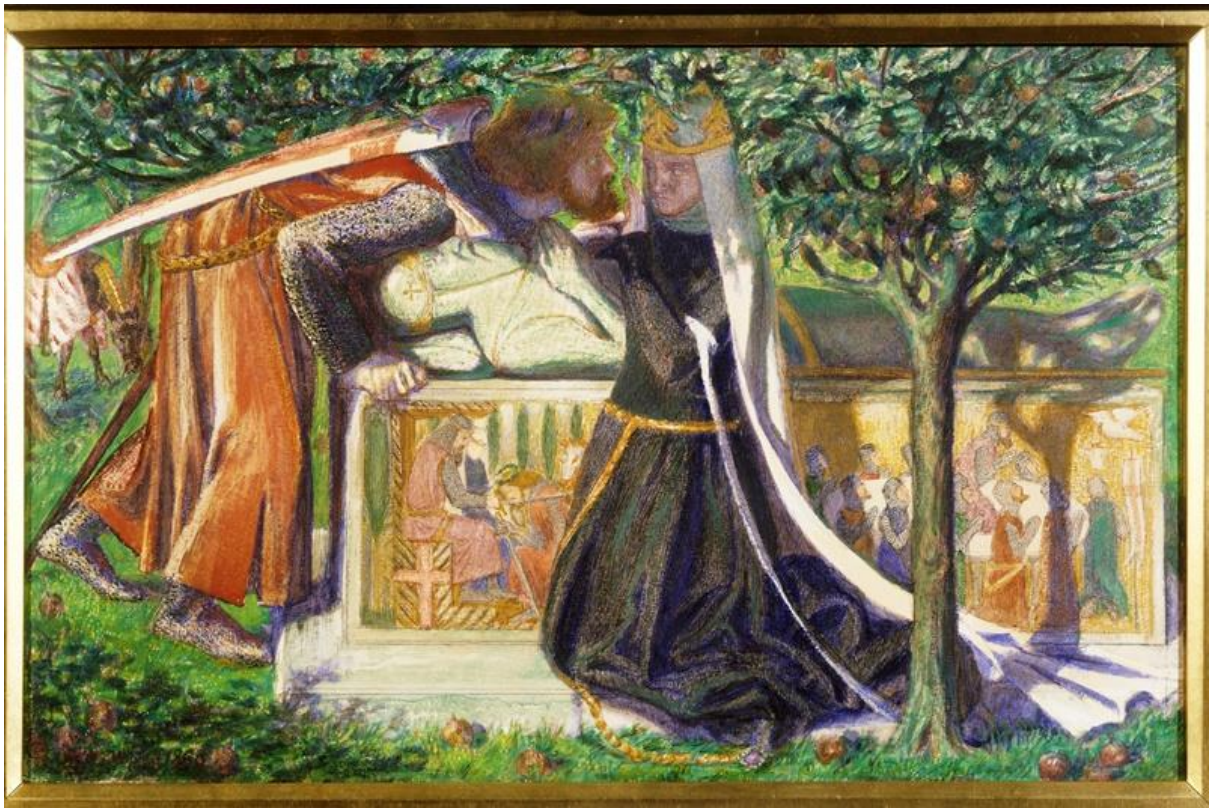

Figure 7. *Arthur's Tomb* (1860) by Dante Gabrielle Rossetti.
Rossetti's watercolour illustrates a passage in Malory's Morte d'Arthur, Book XXI. Queen Guinevere, who has become a nun after the revelation of her adultery, is visited by her former lover Sir Lancelot. The passage ends: '"madame I pray you kysse me, and never no more'. 'Nay', sayd the quene, 'that shal I never do, but absteyne you from suche werkes.' And they departed.'"
By permission of Tate Britain.

Figure 8. *Jane Morris (The Blue Silk Dress)* (1868) by Dante Gabriel Rossetti The Society of Antiquaries of London (Kelmscott Manor).

Figure 9. Red House Bexleyheath, London

Figure 10. Dining dresser designed for Red House by Philip Webb.

Figure 11. *Green Summer* (1864) by Edward Burne-Jones.

Figure 12. *The Sieve Portrait* (c.1580-83) of Elizabeth I attributed to the Dutch Mannerist painter, Cornelius Ketel.

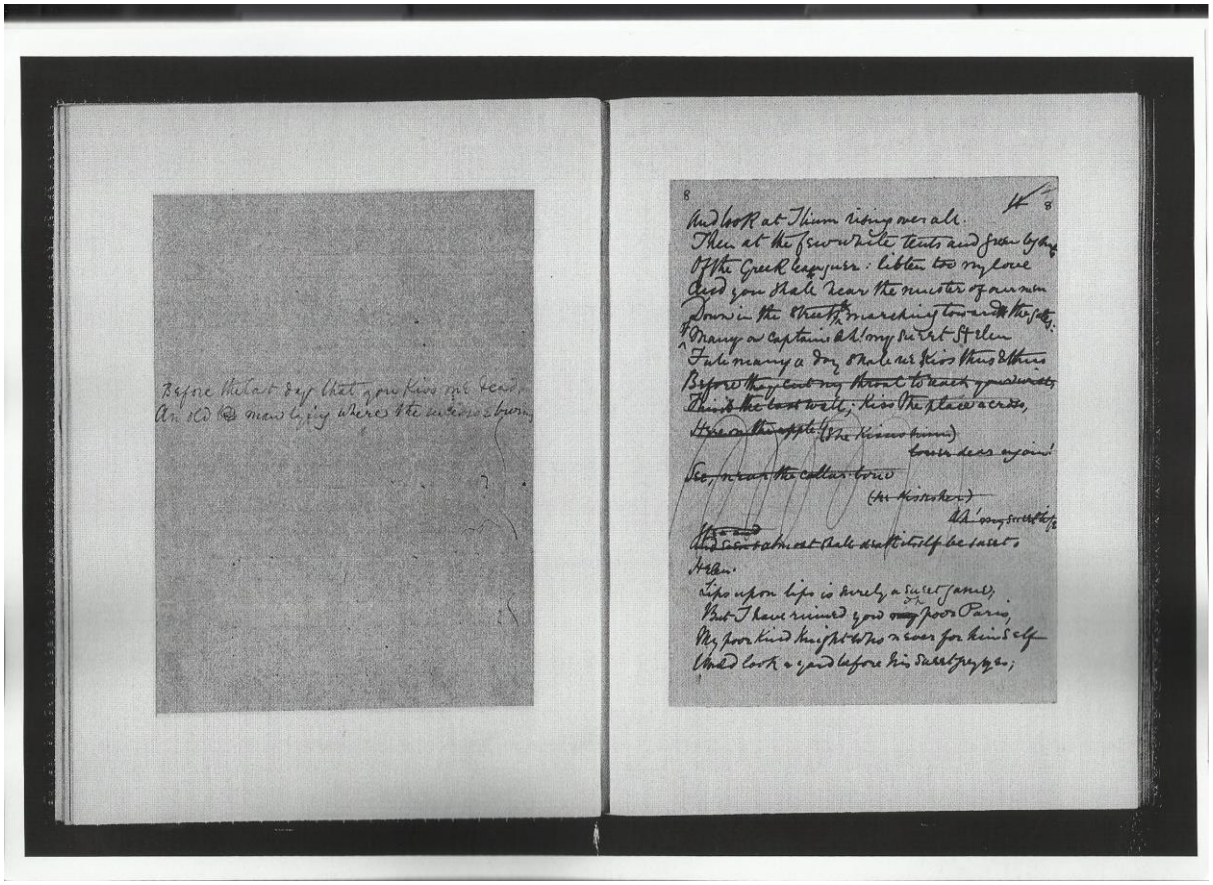

Figure 13. Copy of f.8 of MS Add. 45321 British Library.
This page is from the handwritten draft of Morris's *Scenes from the Fall of Troy* which he began in 1858 and did not complete. Note the deleted lines.

Figure 14. *Iron and Coal* (1855-60) by William Bell Scott.

Figure 15. *The Stonebreaker* (1857) by Henry Wallis.

Figure 16. Kelmscott Press edition of *News from Nowhere* (1892).
The drawing of Kelmscott Manor was by Charles M Gere. William Morris designed the type , borders and ornaments.

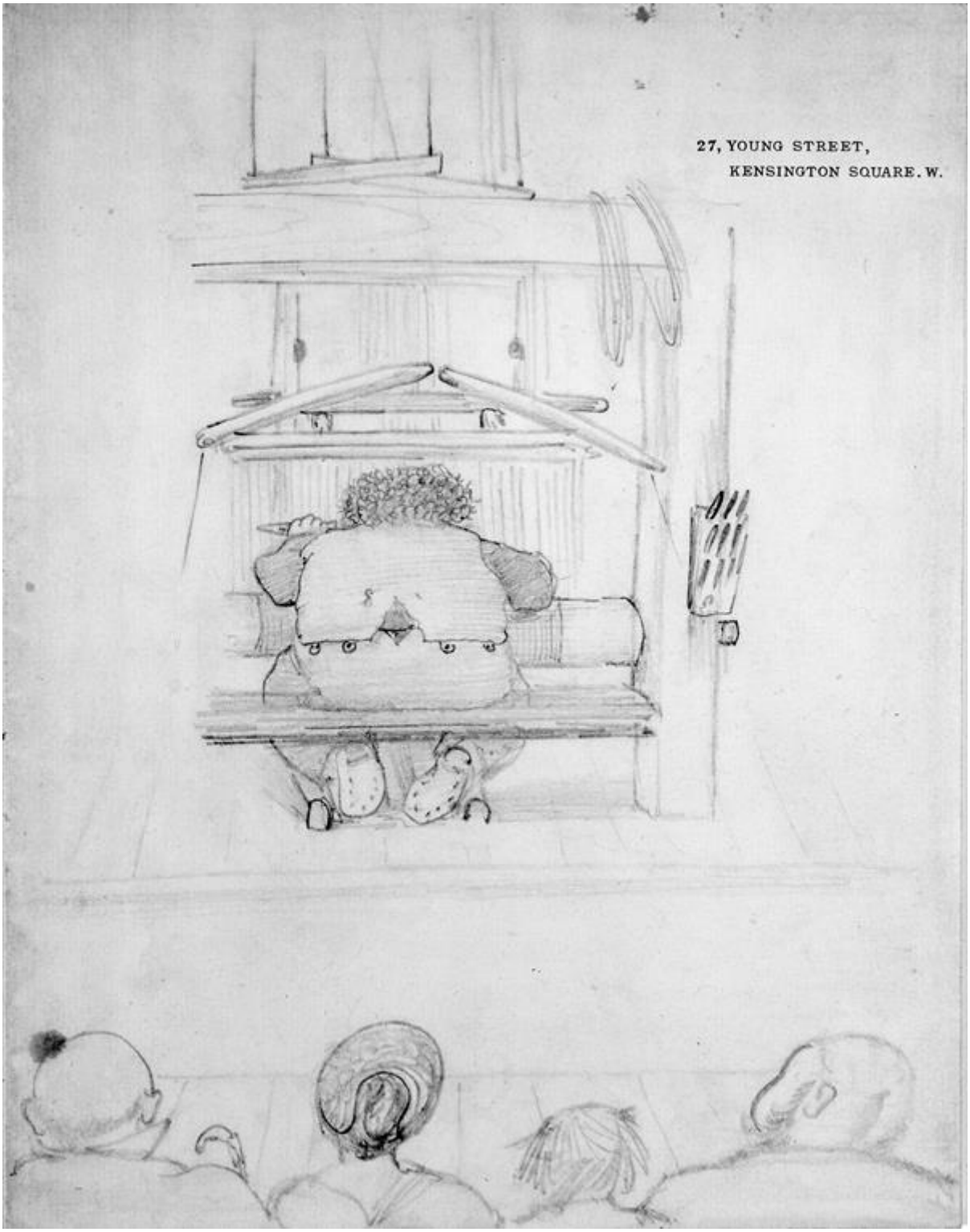

Figure 17. William Morris giving a weaving demonstration (1888).
Drawing by Edward Burne-Jones.

Figure 18. *Daisy* wallpaper (1862).

Figure 19. William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones being blessed by Chaucer (1896) by Edward Burne-Jones.

Figure 20. *Viking Ship* (1883-4). Morris & Co. stained glass designed by Edward Burne-Jones.
Delaware Art Museum.

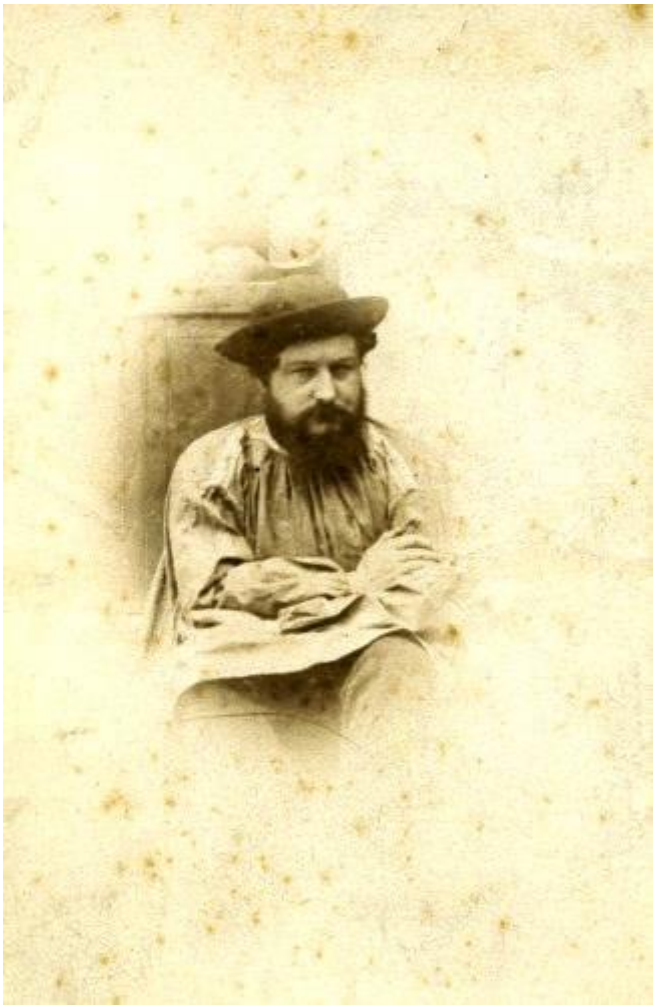

Figure 21. William Morris c. 1870.
By permission of William Morris Gallery, London.

Figure 22. *We Sit Starving Amidst Our Gold* (2013) by Jeremy Deller
From the English Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2013.

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